

LOWELL  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

# FACTORY LIFE

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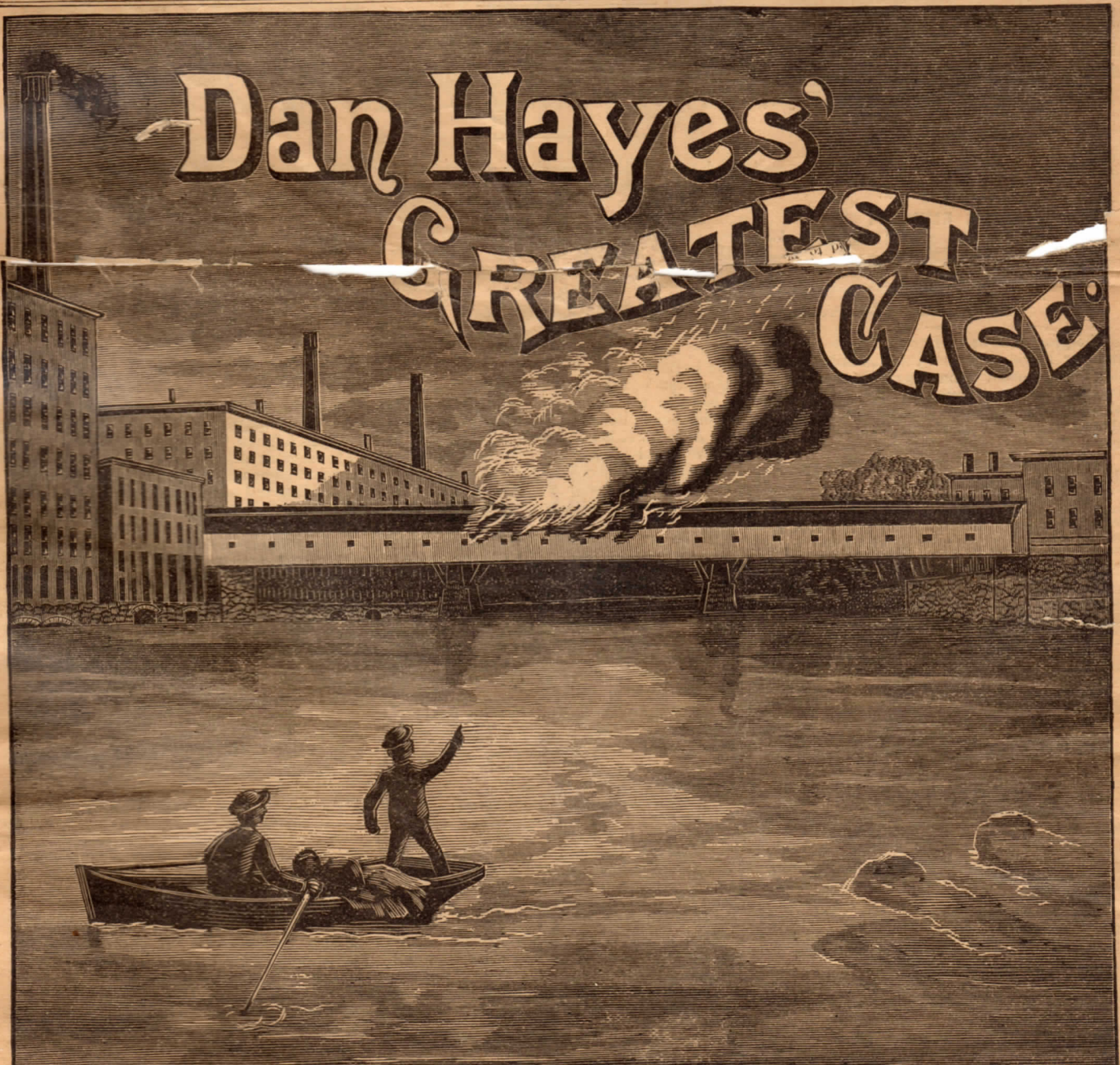
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Vol. I.





# DAN HAYES'

## GREATEST CASE;

—OR,—

## The Mystery of the Central Bridge Fire.

A THRILLING DETECTIVE STORY OF LOWELL.

By GEORGE W. GOODE,

Author of "Kathie, the Overseer's Daughter," "Sea Scourge," "Post Office Detective," "Donald Darke," "Lora Lane," "Dan Hayes, the Detective," "Knight of the Red Glove," etc., etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A PRODIGAL SON.

#### \$5,000 REWARD!

For capture and conviction of John Flanagan, alias Dan Flanagan, the notorious crook and knight of the road, who is now at large upon the case. Apply before four p. m., at the president's office, Appleby National Bank, Lowell, Mass. Signed,

JOHN F. KILBURN, President.

The good citizens of Lowell awoke one fine summer morning to find this somewhat startling notice posted upon every treebox, fence, or available spot throughout the city's limits; also the daily papers contained notices to the above effect, and moreover, explained their meaning.

We will quote from one of the daily papers, the Citizen:

To many the notice of reward advertised this evening in our columns, by the president of the Appleby bank will be comprehensive. For the benefit of the uninformed we will detail the reasons therefor. It will be remembered by many, that about two years ago the vaults of the Appleby bank were entered by professional burglars. That they were plainly professional was evidenced by the fact that not even the patent combination locks, nor thick walls of iron resisted their efforts. The big iron doors were blown open, and between forty and fifty thousand dollars in money extracted.

Diligent efforts were made by President Kilburn, and a score of detectives, to terret out the thieves, but without success. The robbery of the Appleby National Bank has thus far bade fair to remain a mystery. But within a few hours President Kilburn has had information placed in his hands that convinces him of the identity of the thief, or at least the leader of the burglarious gang. Bad Man Flanagan is well known in Lowell, and there is little doubt in the minds of many, but that he is at the bottom of all. It is reported that the celebrated Dan Hayes has agreed to undertake Flanagan's capture. In that event, we cannot but predict a speedy solution of the affair, for Dan never fails.

The other papers contained much the same report, and thus matters stood at the opening of our story. A word as to Flanagan before we go further.

Almost every resident of Lowell is familiar with the character of this man. Shrewd and almost possessed of supernatural powers in the pursuit of his career of crime, he was to the detective profession much like an *ignis fatuus*, now here, now there, but never tangible.

Yet it was averred by many that Flanagan was a modern Jack Sheppard. That, while he

plundered the rich, he was ever subservient to the needs of the poor, and maintained a code of honor quite in keeping with romance, and such like. Most extravagant reports of this sort were circulated.

However it was, he was a most daring and the head of the police in Lowell, a quite conclusive evidence of extraordinary powers.

Among the many thousands that perused the startling notice which opens our story was a young man of habits of leisure in his palatial home in Belvidere.

Upon the upper side of Nesmith street, in the heart of the fashionable part of the city, was this home, the residence of the bank president, John F. Kilburn, and the young man of ease, who reclined upon a rich sofa, with his slippers to the chery coals of a grate fire, perused the article with as much of a show of surprise as his languid, lazy temperament would permit.

Tall he was, and quite handsome, of light complexion, with a curling blonde moustache. But there was a light in his cold, gray eyes positively uncharitable and perhaps evil.

Ralph Kilburn was his name, and he was the banker's son. It might be said, that as Ralph was the only child, the father had pampered and spoiled him. He read the offer of reward, and then opened his gray eyes widely and slowly.

"Egad!" he ejaculated, "what is the governor doing that for? The robbery took place two years ago. It ain't likely that they can get the thief now, whew! What if—"

He paused and with a quick movement flung his half-smoked cigarette into the fire.

Then he arose and strolled over to a window with both hands thrust into his pockets.

"Dan Hayes," he muttered, "curse the luck! If the governor was not so blamed hard on me for money there never would be any trouble any way."

He whistled softly a moment and gazed out over the green velvety lawn below. Suddenly an inspiration seemed to seize him, and he turned quickly.

"Whew!" he ejaculated, "Here it is near four o'clock, and I have got to hustle to keep that appointment."

But at that moment the door swung back and a colored servant stood upon the threshold.

"Mr. Ralph," he said, "the master wants to see you in the library."

"Who? Did you mean father?" queried Ralph.

"Yes, sir."

"What does he want?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Tell him I can't come now," said Ralph impatiently, "I have got an engagement to keep. I'll come later."

But the servant hesitated.

"If you please, sir," he said respectfully, "your father told me to tell you to be sure and come."

Ralph hesitated. Then with an impatient exclamation he said:

"Well, tell him I'm coming."

The servant disappeared and after he had been gone some moments Ralph passed through another door and emerged into a richly carpeted hall. Following this he finally passed through a draped doorway and was in the library, and into the presence of his father and another man. Ralph gave a start as he perceived that his father was not alone.

Mr. Kilburn was a tall, white haired gentleman of patrician mold. His companion was short in stature, but compactly formed, and was possessed of an open genial face. But the features were remarkable for their fineness of expression. A pair of sharp blue eyes looked out from beneath shrewd brows, and a small tuft of whiskers or goatee adorned the chin, otherwise the face was smooth shaven. Such was Dan Hayes, the great detective, for he it was, and Ralph's surprise was great as he recognized him.

Moreover his face paled and his manner became strangely nervous and constrained. The reason for this soon became apparent.

Mr. Kilburn's face was very white and stern. He motioned his son to a seat and said:

"Ralph, I have called you here to speak to you upon a matter of the gravest importance. I need only say to you that my pride is almost crushed, that my heart is nigh to bursting, and you are responsible for this."

It was evident that Ralph was impressed. But only with a vague fear and not from any scruples of conscience. He managed to maintain his self-possession though, and said:

"I pray explain yourself, I do not understand you."



"I will explain," said Mr. Kilburn, with a show of anger, "you have committed an act worthy of the most condign punishment, and were it not for the dragging of our family name through the mud you should feel the full weight and censure of the law. Oh, I can hardly restrain myself from forever disowning you as my son."

"I do not understand you," said Ralph coldly, "what have I done?"

"And would you dare deny it?" said the irate parent. "Since I have learned of your reprehensible conduct, while at Harvard, and how you squandered your money in a gambling house in Boston, I took measures to correct the habits you were forming and cut your allowance. This has led you to a thievish act, and I might never have traced out the true origin of the crime had it not been for the efforts of Mr. Hayes who has brought all to light."

"Crime!" said Ralph, cool to the last. "Dare you accuse me of a crime?"

"It is little short of that," continued the banker. "Some time ago a spurious draft was honored at the bank; the amount was one thousand dollars. The name upon the draft was a forgery, and the bank has been compelled to lose the money. I at once put Mr. Hayes upon the case and he has tracked this forgery of a draft to your door. What have you to say for defence?"

"It is false," cried Ralph angrily, "and if Mr. Hayes, or anybody else, says so it is a lie."

Mr. Kilburn gazed with a burning light in his eyes at his erring son. That was a moment of suffering for him.

The detective seeing that the moment had arrived for him to act gazed keenly at Ralph, and said:

"Do you know Stub Howard?"

Ralph's face flushed hotly.

"Yes," he replied, "I know of him."

"And know him well," said Dan persuasively. "It is of little use for you to prevaricate Mr. Kilburn, for Stub has confessed everything to me."

"Then he is a liar," cried Ralph.

"Hold!" cried Mr. Kilburn in a towering wrath. "Enough of this. Don't add any more untruths to the already long list of your misdeeds, son of mine. Dare to deny this affair again and I will disown you."

Ralph saw that the game was up. He shrugged his shoulders recklessly, however, and said:

"All right. Shove me if you want to, governor. I think it's a pretty mean way for a father to use his son, though. I'd never have done it if you had not cut my allowance down."

"Hereafter, I shall make you no allowance whatever," said Mr. Kilburn. "I mean that you shall work for your living at some honest occupation."

"What?" said Ralph in surprise, "then you don't mean to send me to prison?"

"No," said the banker, "I shall take other means to punish you. Nobody but Mr. Hayes and myself knows of this forgery. I shall make restitution to the bank and Mr. Hayes will never divulge the affair. I do this to save the family name. But I mean that you shall be punished, sir. Now you may go. I want you to come to me in an hour. I want a private talk with you."

"Well, Mr. Kilburn," said Dan Hayes arising to his feet, "I am glad to have been able to serve you. But I sympathize with you for the sad truth which I have unearthed. It was my duty though, as instructed by you."

"Mr. Hayes, I thank you," said the banker. "You are very kind. But you will keep your promise and respect this matter as a secret."

"I will," said the great detective, and then with a low bow he passed from the room.

Ralph scowled as the detective passed him. From that moment he was Dan Hayes' implacable enemy.

He did not linger to face his father again, but slunk from the room like a whipped cur.

He returned to the drawing room and paced the floor in a much disturbed frame of mind.

"Confound the luck," he muttered, "only family pride that saved me that time. What a fool Stub Howard was. I'll never let him into a scheme with me again. Ah, no. But soft—I had almost forgotten my down-town appointment. Ah, ha, tonight, I am to win a great victory. One of the fairest of the fair sex will be mine—perhaps against her will, but never mind. She shall be mine. Sweet Stella Lord, the prettiest girl in the Boott mills. She has rejected my suit, but I have sworn to have her, and I will succeed—if—if Stub Howard does his work well. He has gone back on me once. Will he do it this time?"

Muttering thus to himself, and in not exactly an easy frame of mind, Ralph Kilburn donned his hat and coat and left the house. The cool evening air braced him up and revived his spirits.

He was one of those fashionably bred young men, who when once the step is taken down the hill of ruin never pause at consequences. A terrible future lay before him. The disclosure of the forged note was his first warning. Yet he did not heed the dread "hand-writing on the wall," and, like the Babylonian monarch of old, plunged even deeper into the vicissitudes of crime and recklessness.

Stub Howard, gambler, pickpocket and one of the notorious characters of the city, had been taken into his confidence. Together they had worked out several sharp games, and now the scheme on hand was the forcible abduction of a young girl who was so unfortunate as to possess personal beauty to tempt the fastidious Ralph.

Stella Lord was a sweet girl, and worked, to support an invalid mother, in the great Boott mills.

Incessantly Ralph had sought to win her affections, but she had always repelled him. This was made all the more galling to the villain in the preference that she showed a young and handsome overseer, by name, Edward Maxwell.

Finding himself foiled at every point, Ralph had concocted a scheme with Stub Howard for the abduction of the young girl. It was a daring deed of atrocity, but the two villains did not hesitate at this.

It was to keep an appointment with Howard that Ralph had set forth upon the present night. It was near dark when he came out on Merrimack street, and sauntered along looking for Howard.

At length a man of heavy build, and a brutish cast of features, came along and approached him familiarly:

"Ah, Kilburn," he said in a guttural voice, "you're on hand?"

"Yes," said Ralph impatiently, "I've been looking for you."

"Oh, you have, eh?" said Howard, "well, I s'pose yer anxious to know what's ther verdict?"

"Yes."

"I've got the wires laid."

"You have?"

"Yes."

Kilburn looked interested.

"Well," he said, "what is the game?"

"She is going to Centralville tonight to a party. Maxwell is to be her escort."

"Curse him!" said Ralph.

"Never mind. You can soon get square with him. About midnight they will pass through Central bridge. You know how dark it is when the lights are out in the footwalk. There is our game. We will lay for 'em there."

"But Maxwell—"

"Easy enough. A tap on the skull will settle him. Then over into the river. Do yer see. Ha—ha—what's plainer than that?"

"And the girl is ours."

The two schemers exchanged glances. Each

read the other's mind. Neither flinched at the prospect of a terrible crime reddening their souls. The compact was made. They gripped hands.

"Tonight at twelve on Central bridge," said Howard.

"Yes," replied Ralph Kilburn.

Then they parted. What the night held, what dark tragedy was to be enacted some hours later in the dark footway of Central bridge, none who crossed it in the interim dreamed. But the morning sun would rise and shine upon a scene of devastation, of wreck and of ruin, to cover the traces of a crime chargeable to the perjured soul of Ralph Kilburn, blacker than which has never been written.

## CHAPTER II.

### DAN HAYES ON THE TRAIL.

UPON the evening preceding the events in the previous chapter, Stub Howard, at about the hour of nine o'clock was making his way up Merrimack street, when he was suddenly startled by a touch upon the arm. Wheeling, he gave a cry of surprise.

"John—is it you?"

A man of tall and wonderfully compact frame stood before him. His features were of a shrewd cast, and his gaze penetrating, as now fixed upon Stub Howard.

To Howard he was immediately recognizable. It was no other than the celebrated "Bad Man," or John, Flanagan. That the gambler was on good terms with him there was no doubt.

It was a peculiar characteristic of Flanagan that he seldom affected disguise or seemed to fear capture. He moved about seemingly oblivious to the imminent danger of arrest. Nothing but remarkable shrewdness upon his part had enabled him to keep clear so long.

"So you know me, Stub," said Flanagan, "You have not forgotten me."

"Never," cried Howard warmly, "but ain't you venturesome? There are detectives on your track. I know you are almost infallible, but then they might pounce upon you. I wouldn't be so risky."

Flanagan only laughed quietly.

"They hav'n't got me yet," he said, "Do you remember the time they had me in the house surrounded by twelve policemen, and I gave 'em the slip?"

"You bet I do!" said Howard, admiringly, "that was a good trick."

"They hav'n't caught me yet. But I want to speak with you. As the street is too public a place come into Joe Purcell's with me."

"I'm your man," said Howard. "Lead the way!"

Flanagan drew the gambler's arm within his and entered a saloon near by, which was presided over by a genial individual, well known by the boys about the square as Joe Purcell.

Entering a slip Flanagan called for a glass of liquor, and then while he and Howard sipped their potion they indulged in low toned conversation.

"What have you been doing, Stub, since I saw you last?"

"Picking up a living around the city," said Howard. "I followed the races last season."

"Do you know a chap by the name of Kilburn?"

Howard gave a violent start.

"Do I know him?" he muttered. "Well, he is one of my chickens, you bet!"

"Is that so?" said the great cracksman inscrutably. "Have you been working any game with him?"

"Yes."

"It's none of my business, but what is it like?"

"There's a woman at the bottom of it."

Flanagan laughed quietly and sipped his liquor.

\*This was an actual occurrence.



"He is a character," he said. "I don't know what to make of him. Have you seen that five thousand dollar reward that is out for my head?"

"Yes," replied Howard.

"Well, he is responsible for that."

"Then you did the job?"

"Of course. He got the location, or a chart of the vaults, and put them on paper for me. I gave him six thousand out of the scrape. Of course this is confidential. If his father knew it, great Jer cho—what a row there'd be!"

Howard was surprised.

"So he was in that job with you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, he is enterprising, for a greenhorn," said Stub. "The trouble with him is he ain't sharp enough."

"Look out he don't get your foot in the mud, too," said Flanagan, warningly. "He is reckless. It's none of my business, but I wouldn't like to see you get into the jug."

"I thank you," said Howard. "I will take your advice and look out for him. But—"

He never finished the sentence. Both villains received a most thrilling surprise at that moment.

The door of the saloon had opened and a man entered. To the schemers that man was familiar and was at once the author of a commotion.

"Trapped!" ejaculated Flanagan, half inaudibly. "That is Dan Hayes."

It was indeed the redoubtable detective, and his gaze was fixed upon the villains. They could not conceal their presence. They were exposed.

For once in his life Flanagan had been over reckless.

He sprang to his feet though, and glared about him in a desperate way looking for an avenue of escape. Dan's gaze was upon him, and the detective disregarded Stub Howard, who sat in a terrified heap in one corner of the slip and did not attempt to move.

Several men were at the bar drinking. None of them though had seen Flanagan enter, consequently the succeeding events were a revelation to them.

Dan's eagle eyes were upon the notorious cracksmen, and he advanced toward him in an easy and nonchalant manner. The scene baffles description.

"Ah, my friend, Flanagan," said Dan, who was the first to speak, "at last we have met. I have been looking for you. I want you."

A pair of silver manacles gleamed in the detective's hands as he spoke.

"You will only make a prisoner of me after a hard struggle," said Flanagan, determinedly. "I warn you, Dan Hayes, not to attempt it."

"It will be useless for you to resist," said Dan. "For as surely as my name is Hayes, I mean to take you in."

Stub Howard who had collapsed in the corner of the slip, now sank in a heap under the table. Flanagan, though, boldly stepped out of the slip.

In an instant the attention of all in the bar room had been drawn toward the two men. At the same moment a couple of blue-coated policemen were coming in at the door.

Flanagan was shrewd enough to see that if he were to resist he must act quickly. One foe was easier to contend with than three.

Accordingly he recoiled as Dan advanced. The detective made a quick rush for his man, but the cracksmen, eluded his grasp, and made a flying leap over a billiard table.

Dan was close upon him, though, and a sharp, determined struggle followed.

Both were strong men, and the result for a moment seemed doubtful. But fortune aided Flanagan.

Dan stumbled over a chair and the cracksmen broke his hold, and before the advancing police could reach him, with a derisive cry, had sprung through another room, and out at a back entrance to the saloon.

The detective was on his feet instant, and

was in close pursuit. The police followed him. As for Stub Howard he picked himself up and made haste to vacate the saloon.

Out upon the street, Dan followed his man and turned the corner into Merrimack street again. Down Merrimack street went the chase, pedestrians gazing *qui vive* at the affair, until the corner of Davidson street was reached.

Here the "Bad Man" eluded his pursuers. All search for him was of no avail, and at length, somewhat discomfited, Dan was obliged to give up the chase.

But he authorized police to scour that part of the city assiduously, and guards were placed at all available points. But when night came, Flanagan, as yet, had successfully eluded them.

The morning papers contained a full account of the affair, and great excitement reigned through the city. Bad Man Flanagan was the topic upon everybody's tongue. But few dreamed of the thrilling developments in store.

Dan Hayes maintained an assiduous search; but was not rewarded with success, nor even obtained the slightest clew until near nightfall the next day, when, upon Merrimack street a nondescript lad with a blacking box ran up to him:

"See here, mister," cried the lad, "I'm onto yer. Tell me I don't know yer. Ain't yer name Dan Hayes?"

"Yes," said the detective, eyeing the boot black closely. "And I think I've seen you before."

"You bet! I've put the lustrous polish on them moccasins of yours many a time."

"What is your name?"

"Name," repeated the lad in an inscrutable way, "haint got no regular name. I was named for the people I lived with I s'pose, David Spence, that's my handle, but if yer want reference, ask any of the boys about Davy the Kid. They'll tell yer he's A 1, Bixby's Best, every time."

Dan smiled at the lad's quaint humor. But he more than half pitied the wretchedly clad lad, who, while he possessed all the characteristics of a street gamin, seemed possessed of a cheerful heart.

"Well you can work on those shoes again," said Dan, putting his feet on the box. The boy went to work with a acuity.

"Look here," he suddenly said, rapping his brushes on his box to signify that the job was done. "Ain't you on the look out for Bad Man Flanagan?"

"Yes," replied Dan quickly.

"Give yer a pointer," said the lad with a shrewd wink. "If yer lay low yer can bag him tonight."

In an instant, it is needless to say, the detective was interested.

"What do you mean, Davy?" he queried.

"I might as well tell ye," said the lad. "I was in the St. Charles this morning, shinin', when a couple of fellers came in. One of 'em wore a long beard, and I knowed him right off, but he was disguised."

"Disguised?" ejaculated Dan.

"Yes," said Davy, "It was Flanagan. In course I didn't say nothin', but I made up my mind that Dan Hayes would give somethin' ter git hold of his hair."

"Did you hear anything they said?" queried Dan. "And who was with Flanagan?"

"A Lawrence tough, by the name of Charley Crook."

"I know him."

"You bet!" said Davy energetically. "They didn't see me yer know. I was curled up half asleep near the wash stand. One of 'em came up and washed his hands. They said somethin' about the Pacific Bank in Lawrence. Then this cove with Flanagan said—meet me on der banks of der river, by Little Canada, at one o'clock, sharp. Don't fail. I'll have a boat ready, and we'll drift down the stream as nice as yer please. I reckon they're goin' to Lawrence to pull the Pacific Bank."

Dan was electrified at this bit of news. It is needless to say that it endowed him with a great excitement.

"By the horn spoon!" he cried. "Davy, if you've put me on the right track, I'll make it worth more money to you than you'd make shining boots in a year. You are sure of this?"

"Bet yer boots I am!"

It was a revelation to Dan. His breast swelled. Here was a chance for him to win glory in the capture of the greatest cracksmen in the country. Little Canada is the French Canadian quarter of Lowell, situated upon the southern bank of the Merrimack, near Pawtucket Falls.

A new resolution seized him, and he was quick to decide upon it.

"Look here, boy," he said, "I want you to help me."

"I'm yer oyster," said the lad.

"I want you to go with me tonight to Little Canada. We must have a boat there all ready to follow these men down to Lawrence. If they intend to crack the Pacific Bank, I will be in at the death."

"I tumble," said Davy enthusiastically. "I will be on hand at the appointed place, as ther vilyun said in ther play."

"I can depend upon you?"

"Yes."

"An'ly you'll have a boat all ready there?"

"You bet!"

Davy slid away with his box. It looked to Dan as though he had a great night's work before him.

He returned to his office, and donned a dark suit of clothes, and made preparation for the work in hand. The time sped swiftly by, and almost before he knew it the midnight hour had arrived. But being delayed, it was long after midnight when Dan started for Little Canada. He appeared upon the river bank at the appointed spot.

A slender form slid out of the gloom. It was Davy, who said in a whisper:

"You've got here too late. They've gone, boss."

"Have they?"

"Yes, their boat was gone when I came an hour ago."

"Then we must overtake them."

Davy led the way to the water's edge, where a boat was drawn up. It was noiselessly slid off into the water and both entered.

Using the oars silently, the detective worked the boat out into mid stream and then started down the river.

Davy in the stern steered and kept watch ahead. They had not gone twenty yards when Davy suddenly whispered, through the blackness of one of the blackest of nights:

"What d'yer s'pose that is down there? It looks like a light."

Dan turned his head partly, and at that moment overcame with a wild excitement, Davy lost his restraint and sprang up in the boat, crying wildly:

"Oh, Dan, dy'er see that? Look! Look! Aint that awful? Oh, only look at that!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### A DARK TRAGEDY.

OVERLOOKING the swirling mass of waters known as Hunt's Falls, high up on the hillside was a small, but neat and tasty cottage.

Its interior was plainly, yet comfortably furnished. It had been built some years previous by Robert Lord, an operative in the mills, who dwelt there with his wife and one child, a young girl, named Stella.

But death had overtaken the unfortunate man just at the time when he was beginning, after years of perseverance to become enabled to live easy, his income warranting this. But, alas! a fatal fever seized him and he died, leaving Stella and her mother grief-stricken and dependent; consequently Stella was forced to seek employment in the mills.



But she was young and buoyant with health and did not mind the work. Indeed, it was a pleasure to her to be able to minister to her mother's wants, and she spared no effort to make her happy.

For this Mrs. Lord could not help but be thankful. Her whole being was wrapped up in her child, and it is possible that she bestowed too much love upon her, for it seemed that if anything befell Stella, Mrs. Lord must surely die with grief.

But it was discreetly whispered in the neighborhood that Mrs. Lord would be very apt to lose her treasure, and that Stella would be taken away from her in quite a legitimate way also. A certain young overseer in the Boot mills, by name, Edward Maxwell, tall, straight and handsome was the suspicious personage.

And indeed, if Stella's treatment of the young lover was a criterion, matters were near a crisis. They were ever together, people said, and a handsome couple they were. Maxwell walked home with Stella nights from the mill. At the social gatherings or public entertainments he was exclusively her escort. In vain other admirers sought to pay court. They were all ignored save Maxwell, and he had reason to rejoice.

One night the young overseer lingered longer than usual at Stella's gate, and just before he left, said:

"There is to be a party at the Sanborn's, in Centralville, day after tomorrow, all the young folks in our room are going, will you go with me in the evening, Stella?"

He spoke earnestly and waited anxiously for the reply. Stella was thoughtful for a moment and said:

"Will it be a late party, Edward? You know I do not like to leave mother alone any longer than possible."

"I do not think we can get home before twelve o'clock," said Maxwell. "You know some of the girls have to work over hours, and it will be late before they get there."

Stella hesitated. She would much have liked to go, but she thought of her invalid mother, and a refusal was upon her lips. But at that moment a kindly, musical voice came through the window lattice:

"Certainly you will go, Stella, I shall be quite able to take care of myself. Do not fear for me."

"Mother," said Stella, with an accent of tenderness, "I shall worry about you all the time."

"You need not, my child," said Mrs. Lord. "I shall be all right."

"And I will try to get you home as early as possible," pleaded Maxwell.

"I would dearly love to go," said Stella.

"That settles it," said Edward, with a cheery laugh, "I will be after you. Be sure and be ready when I come."

The next moment he was gone.

Stella, with happy heart, passed through the gate and entered the house.

She had scarcely disappeared when a dark form emerged from the shrubbery near the gate, but not in direct view of the house. It was a man, short and stout, with repulsive features, and no other than Stub Howard.

The gambler had overheard the conversation between Stella and Maxwell, and was evilly triumphant in a sudden dark scheme which had entered his mind. He did not linger in the vicinity, but struck out cityward. A short while later he was in the public streets, which now were lighted up, as darkness had thickly settled down.

In accordance with an idea which had occurred to him he despatched a message to Ralph Kilburn, at his home in Nesmith street, making the appointment for the following night, which we have seen Kilburn keep in a previous chapter.

Ralph Kilburn, when he left his colleague, Stub Howard, on Merrimack street, could not avoid a premonition of what was impending

over his head. He was not so obtuse as not to perceive that consequences of a disastrous sort might result from their desperate plans.

But he was now so thoroughly hardened, and so reckless withal, that he would not have hesitated at even ruin itself staring him in the face. He was in for it, so to speak, and did not think of backing down.

He was determined to meet Stub on the bridge at the appointed time. But as several hours intervened, and nothing was to be gained until midnight, he concluded to repair to some saloon near and pass away the time.

Accordingly he proceeded to Barnard's billiard parlors, where he remained until the clock lacked but five minutes of midnight. Then he set out for the bridge.

As he passed along Bridge street not a pedestrian was in sight. The long row of corporation boarding houses, upon either side, were dark and quiet.

It was one of the blackest nights he had ever seen. But just the night he thought for the deed.

He finally passed the high Massachusetts mill wall, and came to the entrance of the bridge.

Central bridge at that time, was a cumbersome wooden structure, with a carriage way in the centre, and a dark, covered footway, on either side.

The partitions between the footways and the roadway were close, and riverward windows at intervals looked out upon the swirling flood below.

At midnight it had been the custom for the watchman to turn out the lights in the bridge. After that time the bridge was practically unguarded.

As Kilburn entered the right hand footway he could scarcely see his hand before him.

But he pushed on until just as he had reached the Centralville end of the bridge a dark form loomed up, and a whisper came to him:

"Is that you, Kilburn?"

"It is," said Ralph. "Are you there, Stub?"

"You bet I am!" said the villain, who had been on the look-out.

"Is the coast clear?"

"Yes, unless some stray pedestrian comes along. We must trust to luck for that. The watchman went through about twenty minutes ago, and doused the lights."

"You are sure the birds have not been along yet?"

"Oh, yes. But I've got a boat all ready down under the abutment here. Now the racket is this: I'll take Maxwell, when I lay him out we'll grab and drug the girl. Then you must take her and rush down to the boat. D'ye see?"

"And Maxwell—"

"I'll take care of him, never fear. Now don't forget."

The two villains now ceased conversing and patiently awaited the coming of their prey. Several times they were passed by belated pedestrians, but were unseen in the darkness, as they closely huddled against the partitions. Finally, however, Howard ejaculated:

"Sh!"

This latter exclamation was caused by the sudden sound of footsteps. Two persons were coming along the walk to the bridge. The murmur of their voices could be plainly heard. There was no doubt, it was Maxwell and Stella Lord.

Down toward the bridge entrance came the unsuspecting victims. They were talking pleasantly, and not a thought of danger oppressed either as they plunged into the darkness, and the jaws of doom.

They had not proceeded more than ten yards into the footwalk, when a dark panther-like form flew out of the blackness, a crushing blow came down upon Edward Maxwell's head. He gave forth no cry, only a gasp, and was stretched upon the boards of the bridge.

Horror struck, a terrible, wild cry pealed from Stella's lips. It was one shriek, then

powerful hands seized her, something stopped her mouth, and then she knew no more.

"The job is well done," said Stub, hastily placing Stella's inanimate form in Kilburn's arms. "Now for the boat."

Kilburn did not waste time.

He gathered Stella's limp form up in his arms and sprang away out of the bridge.

Left with Maxwell's body the villain, Howard, was in something of a quandary. He knew that it would be found in the walk the next morning. What could he do with it that it might not furnish an important clew to the police?

He was not long in doubt.

Some workmen had that day been repairing the city water pipes which ran through between the partitions separating the drive from the footway.

Boards were removed from this and at an elevation of four feet from the foot walk. In the morning the rest of the partition would be replaced, and it might be years before it was removed again.

The plan suggested to Stub was at once adopted.

He lifted the body high above his head and dropped it down between the partitions. He heard it fall athwart beams within with a thud.

"That ought to be a safe plan," he said, pausing in doubt, "and yet, I don't know."

Meanwhile Kilburn had reached the boat, and awaited the coming of his pal. At length Howard appeared in an excited manner, and springing into the boat, pushed it off.

Down the river he propelled it with long strokes. Not a word was spoken, until almost at the edge of Hunt's Falls, which they were rapidly nearing.

Then both villains sprang up in the boat, as though electrified. A sudden swift wave of light had broken the inky blackness, and the whole surface of the river, with the high mill walls upon one side, and the residence lined shore upon the other, was illumed as bright as day.

Just within the radius of light was the boat, and the warning cry pealed from Kilburn's lips.

"My God! The bridge is on fire!"

This was true. A monster volume of flame had suddenly darted upward through the great structure.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE GREAT FIRE.

At exactly twenty minutes of three the morning of the fifth of August, 1882, Officer Lane of the night force pulled in an alarm of fire from Box 46, and in an incredibly short space of time the fire department, under the direction of Chief Hosmer, responded, and hose carriages, hook and ladder trucks, and all fire wagons, were rushing to the scene of destruction.

There are thousands of people living in Lowell today who will remember the burning of Central bridge.

After pulling the alarm the officer rushed to the bridge and discovered that the fire was near the centre and was making rapid headway.

By this time others were upon the spot, and search was made in the closets for tools, but it was then discovered that they had been removed, and only a wretch was found.

The incendiary who had planned the fire had done his work well, and there was nothing left but to await the arrival of the fire department.

Soon lines of hose were being run from neighboring hydrants, and several streams were brought to bear upon the flames. But they did not serve to even check the devouring element which raged furiously.

It was the darkest of nights, and it was a thrilling sight to see the great structure fast going to ruin.



The fire department, under the supervision of Chief Hosmer, were entitled to much credit for the conspicuous daring and bravery that they displayed in fighting the flames.

Higher and higher, in great columns of smoke and fire, was reared the pyramid of destruction. Both shores of the river were lined with spectators, who watched the thrilling sight with the deepest interest.

When it became evident that the fire could not be checked by advancing upon the bridge, the safety of the great mills which overhung the river bank was feared.

Accordingly men were placed upon the mill roof and streams were kept constantly playing upon the hated walls.

Nearer and nearer drew the fearful rush of flame, driving the firemen before it. Upward, yet higher, shot the volume of fire, and then a terrible catastrophe occurred.

Members of the various hose companies were in the carriage-way of the bridge and upon the roof, fighting the fire, when a warning cry went up.

It was a cry which sent terror to every heart, and caused the men to drop their lines and rush for safety.

"Quick—the bridge is falling!"

Already the centre of the bridge had fallen, and now the remainder was going.

The black river yawned below, ready to receive its offering. It was a moment of terror for those upon the bridge and of anxious, spell-bound solicitude for those on shore.

"Quick! Quick for your life! The bridge is falling!"

Just in time, for many, came the warning cry. Too late, for several.

With a terrific crash the huge structure fell. The water was dashed high up the abutments as the heavy, smoke-charred timbers fell.

All but five had escaped from the bridge. Certain death seemed staring them in the face.

Captain Cunningham, of Hose 6, was one of these unfortunate men, but he saved himself with great presence of mind.

As he felt the bridge going he clutched a telegraph wire, and a moment later hung suspended over the river in the full view of those on shore. It was a moment of terrible peril. A plunge downward meant certain death.

But rescue was at hand, and by the efforts of his brave comrades the heroic captain was released from his perilous position.

James McCormick, of Hose 6, was found on a timber, not much hurt. His escape was miraculous.

Captain Stackpole, of Hose 3, clung to the wall of the abutment and was rescued. But the experience of Edward Meloy was something more severe. He was found, after a search, upon the river bank below in a precarious condition, severely injured and utterly helpless. He recovered, however, we are glad to state, after some weeks' confinement.

William Dana, of Hose 3, also clung to the abutment and was rescued.

Central bridge formed the only method of communication with Centralville. It was built in 1844. Up the river two miles was Pawtucket bridge, which was now all that could be relied upon. At that time the Aiken street bridge had not spanned the river.

In less than two hours from the first alarm, forty feet alone of the bridge remained standing, upon the Centralville shore. The work of destruction was accomplished, and in the river lay a tangled mass of debris, broken timbers, iron bars and rods.

Such is a truthful account of the burning of Central bridge, with which affair we connect the incidents of this story. The cause of the fire has ever remained a mystery, which we shall now in the course of this narrative, give to the reader as unearthed by the consummate skill and courage of Dan Hayes.

But it was believed even then, by the majority, that the fire was of incendiary origin.

A clipping from the Morning Mail, of August 7th, 1882, as given in an editorial, follows:

By the press of New England the fire is generally attributed to sparks from the portable engine used in building the river wall of the Boott cotton mills. Inquiry and examination shows this to be very improbable. The discovery of the fire and the smell of smoke in the roadway of the bridge, by several different persons Friday evening, indicate that the fire had other origin, and the fact that it began and raged most furiously in the middle section of the bridge, and not the one nearest the engine, is another reason for believing that the cause of the fire must be looked for elsewhere.

Of course the loss of Central bridge caused no little inconvenience to those who crossed daily to the city. Public convenience at once demanded a temporary means of transportation across the river.

Accordingly, at the instigation of Mayor Ruelens and Alderman Garity, negotiations were made with Commodore Pierce of Tyngs Island fame, by which the general commodore transferred a part of the Merrimack River Navigation Company's craft to the lower river, and by nine o'clock the next morning ferries were running from shore to shore. Egress and ingress to and from the ferry landing, being made through the wall of the Boott mills.

A few days later a pontoon bridge was constructed, and later the Wilson temporary bridge at the verge of Hunt's Falls, which remained until the present fine structure of iron was completed, and the connecting link once more established between the city proper and Centralville.

All of the data of the thrilling event here given is yet vivid in the memory of many of our readers.

## CHAPTER V.

### A SUCCESSFUL ABDUCTION.

Few who were witnesses of the destruction of the bridge dreamed of the dark affair which had transpired within its walls but a few minutes before the alarm of fire; nor had the remotest suspicion that a human life was involved in the affair, or that the body of Edward Maxwell was wedged between the partition of the foot-walk and the carriage-way. But that such was the truth the reader already knows.

Ralph Kilburn had been truly astounded at sight of the bright columns of flame shooting upward from the bridge. It was too evident that an incendiary had been at work.

"The bridge is afire!" he gasped.

Then a thought seemed to strike him, and he turned to Sub Howard:

"Did you do it?" he queried.

The expression upon Howard's face was frightful. He glanced at Kilburn with intense wrath.

"How could I do that?" he said angrily.

"Curse you, Kilburn, don't you ever whisper such a report as that."

"Of course I wouldn't," said Kilburn. "I only asked a question."

"Yes, I know," said Howard, sulkily, "but I didn't have time to do that, did I? Didn't I come right down to the boat?"

"You were a long time about it."

"You're a fool!" said Howard angrily. "I didn't set the fire."

"Strange, then who has done this thing," said Kilburn, doubtfully. "Do you suppose there was anybody on the bridge to witness what we did?"

"Of course not," said the senior villain. "Don't be a fool, Kilburn! Probably the bridge has caught fire accidentally, and it will be all the better for us as dead men tell no tales, you know. In the bottom of the river, burned beyond recognition, who is ever going to find, or identify, our man?"

"True," said Kilburn, yet in a disturbed state of mind. "But see the flames. How they mount upward! Ah, it is a terrible fire!"

Howard only chuckled, and then turned the course of his boat into the mouth of the Con-

cord river, which here made confluence with the Merrimack.

Just outside of the radius of light he lay back upon his oars, and then they watched the progress of the fire.

Not until the bridge had fallen did they make further move. Then a slight movement upon Stella's part told Kilburn that the effects of the drug were wearing away.

"We must take her somewhere at once," he said; "she is coming to."

"Have you any place prepared?" said Howard.

"No."

"I know of some people who will keep her close and dark until you can bring her to your terms."

If I can get her into my power entirely," said Kilburn, confidently, "I know I can break her will and force her to a marriage with me."

"Well, you've made a good beginning."

"I think so. What is the name of these people?"

"They are schemers, I tell you. Silas and Sarah Chickby, man and wife. They have served me before. Money will buy them. Their place is a secluded one out here upon the old Andover road."

"We will take her there at once," said Kilburn. "Is there a landing place near here?"

"At Davidson street," said Howard, "but when we get there what means of transportation have we?"

"Get a carriage!"

"Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"Who can you get?"

"I know a shrewd fellow. His name is Maguire. I'll get him."

"All right. I'll wait for you in the boat," said Howard. "But I warn you to make haste, or we will get into trouble."

Nothing more was said until finally the boat reached a small landing which was in the rear of Davidson street.

Here Ralph sprang out of the boat and disappeared. It seemed an eternity to Howard, waiting in the boat, ere he returned.

Meanwhile Kilburn had repaired to a stable near by, where he found Maguire, the hackman.

In a short time he was being driven back to Davidson street. There he found Howard who brought Stella in his arms from the boat.

The two villains, with their prize, climbed into the vehicle and dashed away. The driver had been instructed, and soon they were far out upon the Andover road, driving at a break-neck gait.

It was in the gray light of dawn when they finally drew up in the door-yard of a small low-roofed farm-house, situated upon a side road.

"This is the place," said Howard, alighting from the carriage. "You take the girl, Kilburn. I'll get the people up."

Howard advanced to the door of the house, and rapped loudly upon it.

Stella had long since recovered from the effects of the drug. But she could not struggle or cry out for a cord bound her arms, and a gag filled her mouth.

It was a horrible realization to her. A fearful memory of all came back to her, and she was thrown into a state of the wildest agony. She thought not of herself, but of Edward Maxwell and his fate.

In vain she attempted to speak. The gag forbade that and she was obliged to succumb to the inevitable.

Kilburn held her in the carriage while Howard rapped upon the farm-house door.

It was some moments before a reply came back, and then a window was opened above, and a head thrust out.

"Hello, what dy'e want?" was the reply to knock.

"It's you, Silas Chickby?" said Howard.

"Well, I want you."



"Hey? Well, its mighty airy ter call a man up," said Chickby. "Who be ye? Ther constable, I take it. Well, ther ain't no strayed caows or chickens here."

"I want to see you at once, Silas," said Howard. "Come, I am in a hurry."

"What do yer want?"

"I want to do business with you."

"What's yer name?"

"You know me, Howard."

"Oh!"

The window went down with a slam. A moment later, a light flashed out through the windows of the house, and then the door opened. A man half attired, in pants and shirt, held a candle up over his head, and scrutinized Stub, and the carriage beyond, with clear astonishment.

"Well, what dy'e want?" he said, in a harsh voice. "I know ye, Howard. What are ye doin' here this time of the mornin', anyway?"

"Sh!" said Howard. "Don't talk so loud. Look here, I want you and your wife to take charge of a patient for me, dy'e see? She is of course a little crazy. You know the game. There will be money in it."

"Who is she?" queried the old man.

"Nobody, but a mill girl."

"Is all safe then? No money, or friends, back of her?"

Chickby's face, as revealed in the light of the candle, was a hard one. Keen, gray eyes peered inscrutably out from beneath shaggy eyebrows.

"No, its all safe. But business is business. Will you take her or not?"

"Wait till I see Sarah," said the old scoundrel, drawing back from the door.

"What do ye want of Sarah?" said a shrill, treble voice, back of him. Sarah had made her appearance upon the scene.

"The gentleman has got a lady friend who is a little 'off' you know, and he wants us to take care of her. We can give her the black room, yer know."

"Eh?" said Sarah, peering into Stub's face. "Well, upon my soul if it ain't Stub Howard. Boyee, how are ye? Glad to see ye."

"The same," said Stub. "But will you take the girl?"

"Will we?" said Sarah, rubbing her hands briskly. "Ask me, rather, will we not? You bet we'll take the little darlin', and give her the best of care."

"Enough," said Stub. "I want you to do all you can for her. Ralph, fetch her in!"

Kilburn lifted Stella's light form in his arms and followed Stub into the house, the interior of which was similar to many farm houses of the same type.

Chickby and his wife hastened to lead the way to a room in the centre of the house, which upon being entered, was found to be without windows. It was a dark room, similar to many such in the houses of today.

There was but one door to the room. An oil lamp illumined the place, and Stella was placed in a chair.

Then the gag was removed from her mouth and she was permitted to use her tongue. She was at first much terrified and agonized, but since she had learned that it was all a scheme of the man she hated, Ralph Kilburn, she was scornful and very determined.

She flashed a scornful glance at her captors, and then said:

"I can see the truth. This is a game of yours, Ralph Kilburn. Coward, that you are, to raise your hand against a defenceless woman!"

Kilburn only laughed with attempted nonchalance, but he did not seek to meet Stella's gaze. Sarah Chickby came up to our heroine, and with something like a fiendish malevolence, rubbed a hand across Stella's cheek, saying with a leer:

"Never mind, my little darlin'. Ye shall have the best of keer. I'll take charge of ye. Oh, yes, my little darlin'. He-he-he!"

Stella shrank from her repulsive touch.

Her eyes burned with hatred and scorn for her captors.

"What do you intend to do with me, Ralph Kilburn?" she said. "Why have you brought me here?"

Kilburn motioned to the others and they left the room, leaving him alone with his captive. Then he advanced toward Stella, and with affected softness said:

"You must not be harsh with me, Stella. I could not stifle my passion for you. Oh, I mean you no injury, Stella, but it maddened me when I fancied that I was going to lose you, and forced me to a desperate move. Yes, this is a desperate move, attempting to win you in this way, against your will, but 'faint heart never won fair lady.' You must consent to be mine."

Stella's bosom swelled, and her eyes shone like stars. It was a moment before she could speak.

"And you expect to win my love in this way, Ralph Kilburn?" she said contemptuously. "Do you think you will succeed? No, I would never marry you, though death was the forfeit. I have given you my answer once before. Now for the last time, never, and I warn you to take me back to my home."

She was haughty as a queen in this declaration, and Kilburn could not help but see the hopelessness of ever turning her will.

But it only served to urge him on the more, and fire his mad resolution to make her his at any cost. He bowed and moved toward the door, first freeing her hands.

"Very well, my dear," he said with a smile, "we must fight it out on this line. I mean to break your will if I can."

"You will never succeed."

"We shall see. Until you consent to become my wife, this will be your home. I trust you will perceive the folly of your ways and repent your decision when I come again."

The next moment he was gone, and Stella was left alone. Left to herself and a confused variety of doubts, fears, and dread apprehensions. Ah, well she had reason to dread the outcome of the future! What it might be, she knew not. Time only would tell.

Meanwhile Kilburn had descended below stairs, where he indulged in conversation with the Chickbys. An understanding was had with them and all arrangements made.

It was broad daylight when the two left the farmhouse in Maguire's coach, to return to Lowell. They were in an evilly triumphant state of mind.

Before separating after reaching the Spindle City, Howard said exultantly:

"Was ever a scheme worked better than that? Are you not satisfied?"

"I am more than satisfied," said Kilburn. "I give you credit for having planned and executed well. Let it be so in the future."

"What is better than all else for you," said Howard with significance, "you have a clear coast and nothing to fear. You ought to win your game now, for Edward Maxwell is put by forever!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FALSE ALARM.

THAT was a startling cry which Davy the bootblack uttered as he rose in the boat and pointed down the river through the blackness.

"Look there!" he cried again, "what is that?"

The sight to Dan was quite comprehensive. The light which Davy had seen was nothing more nor less than a tongue of flame shooting from the centre of Central bridge.

The next moment other flames followed and settled all doubt. The bridge was burning.

In an instant the detective was deeply interested. He watched the outbreak of the conflagration with a strange thrill.

But he little dreamed that the greatest case of his detective career was to emanate from the burning of the bridge. He watched the fire with merely a sort of curiosity.

"Pull down the river, Davy," he said, "I will steer."

The little bootblack took the oars and propelled the boat swiftly down the current. A moment later the bridge was reached, and they glided beneath it.

Above, the fire was making sad havoc, and they could hear the shouts of the firemen above the thunder of the flames. It was a sublime spectacle, and Dan steered the boat down the stream until below the bridge, when he bade Davy rest on his oars.

With not much more than idle interest Dan watched the fire.

Of course he experienced a feeling of curiosity as to the cause of it, but it did not incline him to maintain any supposition that the bridge had been set on fire by other than accidental cause.

So it was with nothing more than a mere interest that he lingered to watch the flames. But not for long, however.

He exchanged places with Davy once more, after the fall of the bridge, and then said giving way at the oars:

"Keep her in the channel Davy. I guess we'll go along."

"Aye, aye," said the little bootblack. "Bet your coppers I will! But, twixt you and me and the guide post, who could have set the bridge afire?"

"Eh?" said Dan, with a start. "What ground is there for believing that it was set on fire?"

The boot black shook his head.

"I du no," he said. "But somehow I feel as though somebody set that bridge on fire. I shoudn't wonder if it was Flanagan?"

"And why do you think he did it?" queried Dan, with a smile. "What would be his motive?"

"Dunno," said the bootblack, dogmatically. "Don't make any difference. I think it is so."

"In that event we are on the wrong track then," said Dan. "We ought not to go to Lawrence."

"Yes," said Davy, "bet your boots we want to go to Lawrence."

"But Flanagan will not be there. It is hardly likely."

"I don't care," said Davy, stubbornly. "Flanagan set the bridge on fire, and he has gone to Lawrence. See if I ain't right. Bet your boots I am!"

"All right," said Dan. "We will pursue him then. But look here boy, you are sure you are not getting me upon a blind trail? My time is valuable, you know," and he smiled to himself.

"No," said Davy, positively. "Cross my heart, I ain't foolin' ye. Keep your oar up; there's a snag."

They were now in the rapids, and it required their attention exclusively to keep the boat straight, and to keep clear of rocks without further talk.

The rapids were shot swiftly, and in safety, however, and they glided into smooth water again.

The burning bridge was now hidden from view. Dan Hayes was thoughtful as he bent to the oars. He had faith in Davy's integrity, but he feared the boy had made a mistake, and that he was wasting time in going with him.

But second thought decided him not to turn back.

He admonished Davy to keep in the shadow near the right bank of the river, and then bent all his strength to the oars.

He sent the light boat speeding down the current, while Davy kept a close watch ahead.

But though they went for miles in this way, not a view of anything was to be had. But this would have been difficult in any event, as the darkness was so intense. But brave little Davy did not relinquish confidence in his faith that Flanagan was just ahead of them.

Thus bend after bend was turned in the



river's course, mile after mile was covered, until at length, as the gray light of dawn first began to appear, Dan saw that they had come within view of Lawrence.

One thing was settled in the detective's mind.

If Flanagan and his pal, Crook, had started out that night to make a raid upon the Pacific bank, they must have reached Lawrence hours before, and probably left Little Canada three hours before they had. In any event, Dan hardly credited the belief that they had even entertained an idea of attempting the bank robbery that night.

"They mean to make the attempt tonight," he muttered. "That is Flanagan's game. Ah, well, he will meet with a hot reception."

But it was not impossible that the bank breaking had been already accomplished. This was Davy's belief as he stated that Flanagan's arrangement with his pal was to this effect.

"Bet yer boots it's straight!" said the lad; "I ain't no mule; I kin hear, you bet!"

They went ashore at Lawrence and walked down South Broadway to the city proper. Then, when they reached Essex street, they strolled casually past the Pacific bank.

Dan made a reconnoissance of the building, and was convinced that it had not been entered. This was early in the morning and but few people were abroad.

As it would be some while before the bank would be open, or for that matter any of the business houses, Dan proceeded with Davy to the Central house, a hotel on Essex street.

Here they procured breakfast, then some while later Dan went forth once more.

He visited the Pacific bank, and interviewing the president, informed him of the scheme against the bank. His information was gratefully received with an assurance that due care would be taken to foil the cracksmen, when they showed up.

All this was conducted with the greatest possible secrecy. It was planned that that night Dan should, with other officers, lay in wait in the building for the rogues, when capture would be easy.

All this was arranged and Dan returned to the Central house to await developments. He felt quite sure of bagging the birds this time. Davy was very sanguine.

"They didn't get down here in time, you bet!" said the bootblack. "And they'll try the racket tonight. But we'll be there on time."

Dan realized that it would be more consistent with discretion and safety to travel about in disguise, and accordingly proceeded to make himself up for a clerical man.

Dan was an adept in the makeup line, and soon had so metamorphosed himself that Davy hardly knew him.

Well satisfied with the change, he took the bootblack with him and went out upon the street. It was his main object to run across the bank breakers, if possible, but his efforts were not rewarded with success. If they yet remained in Lawrence, they displayed remarkable sagacity in keeping out of the way.

Of course Dan was not positively assured that Flanagan was in the city, and meditated an attempt upon the Pacific bank. He had only Davy the bootblack's somewhat doubtful testimony to that effect.

However, now that he had undertaken the case, he was not disposed to drop it, for there might be more of reality in it than at first would seem. Davy might be mistaken as the detective was sometimes inclined to think that he was, but, if Flanagan did meditate such a feat he would be fully prepared for him.

Thus matters were. Dan finally returned in the latter part of the day to the Central house, and awaited the coming of darkness.

The night came at last after a period of tedious waiting, and then the hours dragged slowly by until midnight.

At that hour Dan left Davy at the hotel and started for the bank. He crept along the deserted street, and was admitted by the watch-

man upon his arrival there. Three officers were in waiting in the vaults for the anticipated coming of the burglars.

But the night hours wore away and they did not appear. At length it became a certain fact that the alarm had been unfounded, and the affair a hoax, or that the bank breakers had smelled a rat, and made good their escape from Lawrence.

As it was, nobody had seen them in Lawrence. No other warning had been received other than that brought by Dan Hayes. People became incredulous, and altogether the bank officials were disposed to look upon Dan as an alarmist. It is needless to say that all this displeased Dan much, and when he returned to the hotel in the gray morning light he was not in an over-agreeable frame of mind.

Davy was yet sitting up waiting for him, and he looked up eagerly as the detective entered.

"Well, boss," he said, "did yer bag 'em this time?"

"Bag them!" echoed Dan in a very much disgusted tone. "Don't say anything more to me about Flanagan. No, they didn't show up."

Davy was crestfallen. He could hardly believe the statement, and was a trifle incredulous.

"Then it was some other bank," he said. "I know I didn't make any bones of overhearing what they said. Do I know Flanagan? Well, you bet! Wasn't our alley next to theirs, and didn't my mother allers tell me when I was a kid to look out for Bad Man Flanagan? Well, I ain't mistaken. There's something wrong about all this."

Dan was convinced that the lad was sincere, and yet he was sure that he was laboring under a mistake. But he was satisfied that Flanagan was not in Lawrence. He decided to return home at once.

He announced this intention to Davy, who was much disappointed, but of course could not say anything. Silently he put on his ragged cap and accompanied the detective to the station.

Everywhere boys were crying papers containing an account of the burning of Central bridge. Dan bought a paper and read the report.

At once he reached a decided conclusion. This was that the bridge had been set on fire. It was no accidental cause.

Satisfied in his mind of this, he bought tickets for Lowell, and was about to board the train with Davy, when all at once the bootblack cried:

"I told you so! There they are. Flanagan and Crook. See 'em going out the door."

Dan glanced in the indicated direction and saw two men going through a side door in the depot. There was no denying the fact, it was Flanagan and his pal.

In a moment the detective was all agog, and started in pursuit of his birds. A crisis had arrived.

## CHAPTER VII.

### FLANAGAN AGAIN ELUDES THE DETECTIVE.

THE sight of Flanagan and Crook was like a shock of electricity to the detective, Dan Hayes. It settled all doubt in his mind at once as to Davy's veracity.

He made a leap forward with a sudden impulse and reached the door. Glancing beyond he saw his men just disappearing around a street corner.

The detective made all haste to cover the distance between him and the corner. Arrived there he was rewarded with a great surprise.

He looked up Essex street. The thoroughfare was thronged with people, but he saw Flanagan standing alone about a hundred yards distant.

Crook, his pal, had left him. Where he had gone, and whether Flanagan was awaiting his return or not, the detective could not conceive. But certain it was the notorious crackman

continued to stand gazing up the street.

Dan was undecided what to do. His man was in sight, and it would not seem a difficult matter to go up to him and arrest him. But a motive withheld him from this move.

This was a sudden thought. Why not wait and learn what move the crackman was about making? Perhaps by doing a little shadowing he might learn much.

Davy the bootblack hung in the detective's rear. Dan now turned and beckoned to him. When he came up the detective said:

"Davy, I want you to go up the street a ways, until you have passed Flanagan. He will not know you or suspect your purpose. See if Crook is about. Come back to me."

"I'm yer oyster!" said the lad, moving away. "I'm goin' to apply for a detective license mys-If, ahem! Davy the Kid, or the bootblack detective. Chapter first; on the trial of Flanagan. Ta-ta!"

With this characteristic sally he slid away in execution of Dan's order.

He disappeared in the crowd, and the detective was awaiting his return when Flanagan made a change of base.

He came directly down the street toward the detective. Dan shrank back around the corner. It seemed as though he must be seen, but Flanagan passed close by him and once more entered the depot.

The detective followed him.

This time Flanagan purchased a ticket. When he had moved away from the window Dan advanced and made inquiry, and learned that he had bought passage to Salem.

Dan was befogged as to the intent of the crackman. However, he did not stop to question the mystery further, but hastened to board the train in Flanagan's rear. He had scarcely done this when he thought of Davy.

But he knew the lad would be all right for he had a ticket to Lowell, and upon losing sight of Dan would undoubtedly return home without delay and with safety.

Accordingly he experienced no feeling of alarm for the lad as the train rolled out of the depot.

Flanagan occupied a seat in the smoking car. The detective was in the first-class car, but he kept watch of his man at the stations. In this manner the train sped on until the Y, at Tewksbury Junction was reached.

Then notice was given that all persons desiring to change for Lowell must here alight. To the astonishment of Dan, Flanagan left the train.

Of course Dan did the same, and crossed the platform to the Lowell train. He boarded it just in Flanagan's rear, as before, and in this way the train sped on to Lowell.

Stops were made at intermediate stations, and Lowell was being neared rapidly, when all at once there came a sudden swaying motion of the car, then a jolting, and then the detective was pitched forward, and striking his head against the car seat was rendered unconscious.

When he came to he was lying upon the grass without the car, and a number of people were bending over him.

"He is only stunned," said a voice, "and, as luck has it, he is the only person on the train at all injured."

Dan with an effort arose upon his elbow at this. With difficulty he gazed about him and said:

"What has happened?"

"A little accident," said the first speaker, who was evidently a medical man. "How do you feel?"

Dan could see the truth now for himself. The train had struck a broken rail, and the car in which he was seated had jumped the track. But little damage was done as the couplings had parted and no embankment was near. The rest of the train had backed down to the scene of the accident, and it was found that, fortunately, Dan was the only passenger who had suffered any injury.



And his was of such a trifling sort that he was enabled to soon get upon his feet practically as sound as ever, save the ringing in his head.

Despatches had been sent for a wrecking train, and the balance of the train, which was not derailed, only awaited its arrival to move on to Lowell. Dan's first thought was of Flanagan.

But the cracksmen was not to be found. He was not on the train or in the crowd about.

Dan was not a little disconcerted. Where had he gone? There was but one hypothesis.

He had seen the detective, and recognizing him, had taken the alarm and fled. Once more the mysterious king of cracksmen had asserted his faculty of eluding the law.

Dan was disappointed not a little, as he had counted on taking his man back to Lowell with him. But there was no help for it, and he was obliged to succumb to the inevitable.

In due course of time the relief arrived, and the train proceeded on its way.

Dan alighted in the depot a few minutes later, and at once set out for headquarters.

Arrived there he found the chief looking anxiously for his return.

"I have been looking for you," he said, "Dan, I have firm belief that this bridge fire was the work of an incendiary. I want you to look the case up at once. I know you can get at the bottom of it if anybody can."

"I saw an account of the fire in a Lawrence paper," said Dan, "and at once made up my mind that it was of incendiary origin."

"You will go to work upon the case at once?"

"Yes."

The chief had scarcely finished speaking when a lady, past middle age and wearing a black crepe veil, entered the office. She advanced to the desk and said:

"Oh, sir, are you the chief of police?"

"I am," said that worthy. "What can I do for you, madam?"

There was unmistakable distress depicted upon the woman's once beautiful, but now pinched and care-worn features. That she was an invalid was apparent.

"I am a widow, sir," she said, pathetically, "and am oppressed with poverty. I live by the river side below Hunt's Falls. Only night before last my daughter, Stella, in company with a young man by the name of Maxwell, went to a party in Centralville. They should have been home at midnight, but I have not seen them since. Mr. Maxwell has not returned to his work in the Boott mills, and Stella has not come back to me. Oh, indeed I fear that something terrible has happened to them."

"Be seated, my good woman," said the chief, who was at once interested, as was Dan Hayes. "Tell me, was this young man keeping company with your daughter?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Lord, for she it was. The chief exchanged glances with the detective.

"An elopement," he suggested. "You must not feel badly, my good woman. The bird has tired of its cage and flown away to join its mate. Young people will do those things you know. Was the young man of good character?"

"The best," said Mrs. Lord. "Oh, no, I do not credit that for a moment. Stella would not do such a thing, and Edward was too noble."

"Edward Maxwell?" repeated Dan Hayes. "Was he not an overseer in the Boott mills, madam?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know him well. He is a gentleman. I can vouch for his character," said Dan warmly.

"Oh, it was no act of either," said Mrs. Lord positively, and with anguish. "Oh, you cannot know my fears. I have a horrible presentiment that they went down with that bridge. They would have to pass through it

coming home. They left the party at a little past two o'clock."

"And have not been seen since?" queried Dan.

"No."

"There is surely something wrong about that," said the detective, gazing inquiringly at the chief. "Can it be that there is something of a tragedy connected with this fire?"

A moment of silence ensued. Then Mrs. Lord spoke:

"Oh, I wish you could help me. I am sure that they got into that terrible bridge and were either drowned or burned to death. Oh, my heart is breaking. I know—I know that Stella is lost to me forever."

Here the poor woman broke into sobs. The detective and his chief were both affected, and when she had to a certain extent regained her composure, Dan said with sincerity:

"Truly I am sorry for you, my good woman. But keep up a good heart. I will help you. I will give my immediate attention to this affair, and you shall know as soon as possible the foundation of your fears."

"Oh, Heaven bless you!" said Mrs. Lord, arising to go. "I know that God will help you. I thank you much."

When she had gone Dan turned to the chief. There were tears in his eyes. He was a detective, and constantly in contact with the depraved side of humanity. Indeed it was seldom that he met with the traits of honor and excellence, his experience tending rather to the hardening than the softening side of life, yet his was a deep, sympathetic nature, and his heart was touched.

"Chief," he said, "it is my duty to help that woman. Something tells me that a heap of rascality remains to be unearthed from beneath the mystery of the burning of Central bridge, and I will do it if it costs me the best part of my life, and the best efforts of my career as a detective. Mind what I say: I am going to know what that mystery is and who put the torch to the bridge, before three months have passed, besides setting this poor woman's mind at rest. I'll do it, as sure as my name is Dan Hayes."

We shall see how he kept his word in future chapters of this story.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A MENTAL WRECK.

It was a terrible position in which Edward Maxwell had been left between the bridge walls. The enemy's plan was a cunning one, and would not have fallen short of success had it not been for what seemed like a special dispensation of Providence.

For Edward Maxwell had not succumbed to the grim destroyer when he was struck the terrible blow upon the head by Stub Howard. Fate had not ordained that he was to end his career in so summary a manner, else many of the most important incidents of this story had never been written.

The blow had been a crushing one, but, beyond producing insensibility, or a stupor closely resembling death, had engendered no serious consequences.

Howard had been so extremely excited that he had not noted the fact that Maxwell's heart yet beat with regular rhythm. But such was the case.

Of course, upon coming to, Maxwell had no clear idea as to what had happened. It was some moments before consciousness asserted itself.

Then he realized that he was jammed in between walls and was nearly suffocated.

He lay quite still and strove to collect his scattered senses. It was some time before he could think clearly and a memory of the past came back to him.

Then he remembered that he had entered the foot-walk with Stella. Where was she? Where was he? These were the first queries which occurred to him.

He opened his lips and called aloud. What had happened? He had seen no assailant and only had a consciousness of a heavy weight falling upon his head.

Then he attempted to penetrate the gloom about him. But all was utter blackness. He endeavored to feel about with his hands. They encountered only the rough boards, and then he discovered that he was lodged and hanging across a heavy wooden beam.

And now to his ears came strange sounds. He could hear a dull roaring like thunder. The beam that he was on shook like an aspen and a smell of smoke came to his nostrils.

In an instant the truth came to him. Wherever he was, fire was near him.

And now as he arrived at this conclusion he chanced to glance downward and a flash of flame illumined the surface of the river below. He experienced a terrible shock of horror.

But where was he? How came he in this position. He was upon the bridge to be sure, but how far from the footwalk where he had left Stella?

This was a question which was answered in a decisive manner before many moments. No sound came to Maxwell's ears above the roar of the flames.

Now the smoke grew thicker. By this time he regained his senses almost entirely and, by examining his position with his hands, discovered that he had in some way become wedged in the bridge partition. His surprise was great.

How he came there was a mystery. But there was no time left for useless cogitation and he realized that prompt action must be made if he wished to save his life.

Accordingly he proceeded to extricate himself from his position as best he could. With an effort he raised himself up and reaching above him grasped a timber. But as he did this a startling calamity occurred.

The flames had reached that part of the bridge where he was and the timber upon which he was supported now became loosened and fell with a mighty splash into the river below.

This left Maxwell with only a slight hold with his hands upon a small timber above him.

This was a most precarious position, and it was impossible for him in his weakened state to hold on much longer. He lost his grip all at once and fell.

Down he went and shot into the water.

When he came up fortunately his grasp encountered a timber to which he clung. This was his salvation.

But he was in an extremely weakened state and with difficulty kept his hold.

Down the river's current he was whirled upon the timber until finally he went over the rapids and began a terrible race through the plunging, whirling water, which he never forgot to his dying day.

He clung to the timber with the desperation of despair.

Down the mad current he went. The swirling waters picked him up with the timber and flung him from one jagged rock to another, plunged him into whirlpools, and out, until his face and body were lacerated, and he was nigh dead with exhaustion.

At length the rapids were passed and he floated out upon the broad surface of the river.

After floating on thus for some ways, and resting as best he could, he left the timber and struck out to swim for the shore.

It was the blackest night he had ever seen. Yet he could faintly see the dim outlines of the shore, and with all his strength made for it.

Nearer he drew, but yet it seemed far away.

His strength was fast failing. Would he reach it? He thought of his fate if his strength should entirely give out. He would go to the bottom of the river, and his fate perhaps never be known.



Again and again he essayed to reach the shore. But yet it baffled him.

He raised himself upon his arms and gazed at it. It seemed to mock him, and the knell of doom seemed ringing in his ears. But yet he did not desist. He kept on with all his strength. Now it was but a few yards away. With a mighty effort he reached the shore and dragged himself out.

It was a superhuman effort and the last act of exhaustion. He crawled with agony to the green sward, and then sank down in a heap.

The clanger of a thousand bells seemed ringing in his ears. His muscles refused to act, a sinking sensation came over him and he knew no more.

The morning sun was high and bright in the heavens when Shepard Woods, farmer of Tewksbury, chanced to visit the lower part of his farm, which here touched the river.

Almost the first object his gaze encountered upon reaching the river bank was the inanimate form of Edward Maxwell.

A cry of horror broke from his lips, and the great hearted farmer descended the river bank and bent over the senseless man.

"He ain't drowned," he muttered, "but he is pooty well played out."

The rough farmer, with the kindly heart beneath his frock, gazed perplexedly at Maxwell a moment.

"Reckon if I could only get him up to ther house ther wimmen folks could do something for him," he continued. "Wonder if he's heavy."

Shepard Woods was a strong man. It did not trouble him at all to lift Edward's light form in his strong arms and carry him like a child up the bank and across the fields. The farm house was not more than half a mile distant and so he reached.

Quite a commotion was made when the farmer appeared with his burden, but true to Shepard's prediction the "wimmen folks," with customary softness of heart, took charge of Maxwell and his wants were ministered to in a manner that would have excited the envy of a hospital nurse.

But the young overseer did not respond to the attempts made to bring him to.

He yet remained stubbornly unconscious, and a slight hectic flush appeared upon his cheeks. Mrs. Woods said to her lord.

"I think, Shepard, you had better go to town for Dr. Irish, at once. I am afeard he is bad off."

The good farmer needed no second urging. At once he harnessed his best horse and sped away upon the humane errand. When he returned he brought the doctor with him.

Meanwhile Maxwell had come out of his swoon but was very restless and seemed consumed with a fever, while he muttered incoherently the while.

Dr. Irish, a skillful physician and surgeon, made a diagnosis of his condition and at once said:

"I am sorry for the young man. His is a critical case."

"But he will come out of it, doctor?" queried the farmer's wife.

"Oh, yes, he will live," said the medical man, shaking his head gravely. "But it will be a barren life. He has gone beyond the limits of mental endurance, and, when he comes out of this fever will be, perhaps not insane, but much impaired in intellect. Such cases are frequent where one has received a concussion of the brain. I am truly sorry for the young man. I can break up the fever and save his life, but back of all this the past will be a blank to him."

His prediction was verified.

Word of Maxwell's condition reached Lowell. A great excitement was at once created.

To many the mysterious disappearance of the young overseer and Stella Lord had presented a deep mystery. Dan Hayes was one of the first to visit Maxwell at the Woods'.

Maxwell had lucid intervals, but when

asked about Stella only said in a mumbling way:

"Where is she? The bridge. It is falling—it is falling."

This was enough to make Mrs. Lord almost crazy with a terrible fear. She firmly believed that Stella was in the wreck and was drowned. As Maxwell had been picked up out of the water this made such a fear look reasonable.

But that her fears were groundless the reader knows. Dan Hayes was not deceived.

He knew that rascality was at the bottom of all and he had suspicions as to the identity of the guilty parties. But he remained silent for the nonce.

"Time will tell," he said grimly, "for I am sure to unravel this mystery."

## CHAPTER IX.

### PERSECUTING THE PRISONER.

MEANWHILE what were the adventures of Stella Lord in the care of the sanctimonious pair of schemers, the Chickbys, at their place in Andover? The young girl was possessed of extraordinary courage, and bore her misfortune with coolness and bravery, which is unusual to girls of her age.

Where many another would have been overwhelmed with despair she was defiant and confident.

"I will never yield," she had said, "and Ralph Kilburn will find that he is not dealing with a child. I am a weak woman, but I have a will and he shall not break it."

After the departure of the abductors she had been left alone in her prison chamber.

As it was a close room without windows, there was no reasonable hope of making an escape from it by force. Yet she carefully examined the walls and look on the door.

A chimney descended at one end of the room and formed a fireplace. The bricks were old and easily displaced. She took note of this with care.

A bed and chair was the only furniture in the room. The oil lamp which had been left for her use was burning dimly.

The outlook was by no means a cheerful one for Stella. What troubled her most was the mystery concerning the fate of Edward Maxwell, her lover.

"Oh, I fear they have killed him," she moaned. Then her lips set firmly and she said with much spirit:

"If they have harmed him they shall pay for it. I will see to that. I never dreamed that Ralph Kilburn was such a villain. But I mean it. He shall suffer for this!"

She listened at the door but could hear no sound. What had become of the Chickby's she knew not but inferred that they had retired again.

She was weary and exhausted and cast herself finally upon the bed, but not to sleep.

The fickle god of slumber refused to be wooed. She could not dispel from her mind the terrible scene in the bridge.

After a while, it seemed an eternity to her, she heard footsteps without and then the door opened and Mrs. Chickby crossed the threshold. She looked at Stella a moment and then said: "Well, my pooty, rattlerly, yer in th' net ain't ye? He—he—he. 'Pon my soul yer pooty enough to win any man's heart. But say now, how d'yer like bein' shut up in a dark room like this?"

"You dare to ask me such a question as that?" said Stella flashing a glance of scorn at the woman. "And if you are a party to this affair, you are a disgrace to your sex."

"Eh, am I now?" said the woman insolently and angrily. "Well yer kinder sassy, I take it, ter people on whom yer dependant for good usage. Come now, be a leetle more polite or it 'll go hard with ye."

"Oh, you need not think to intimidate me," said Stella with spirit. "I am not in the least afraid of you."

"You ain't, eh?"

"No, and I can tell you it will be the worse for you one of these days for shutting me up this way. I mean to escape and when I do you shall suffer for it."

Mrs. Chickby only laugh d scornfully and deposited a platter, with some food upon it, upon the table.

"I've handled gals like you afore," she said uncouthly. "But hyer's some grub for yer. Eat it and be done with yer cheap talk."

The door was slammed behind her. Stella was in by no means an easy frame of mind, yet she was hungry so did not hesitate to partake of the food.

When she had finished the repast she sat down by the fire-place. The oil lamp had long since burned out and only a dim light came into the apartment through a transom over the door.

After a while Mrs. Chickby returned and removed the platter. Then, an hour after, her husband came in and said:

"I'm agoin' ter take yer into a better room on ther promise of good behavior. I expect Mr. Kilburn will be here today to see yer. Come, brace up!"

Stella said nothing but suffered herself to be led out of the chamber by her captor and into another room the two windows of which overlooked the front yard.

This was a more cheerful room and a welcome change to the young girl. The room was more neatly furnished and she experienced some relief at the change, though her captivity was most galling to her.

Left alone once more she gave way to a feeling of intense weariness which had come over her and reclined upon the bed. The counter effects of the drug were beginning to work and in a few moments she was fast asleep.

The overtaxed mental and physical system, influenced by the after effects of the drug, had brought on a stupor from which she did not recover for many hours.

When she finally awoke it was growing dark again and Sarah Chickby was standing over her.

"Well, my gal," said the old woman leeringly, "had good a sleep, haint ye? Want suthin' to eat?"

Stella partook of the repast brought her and then arose and paced the chamber in a state of most intense mental excitement.

No more sleep for her that night. The morning broke before she ceased pacing the floor, but she could not throw the subject of Edward's fate from her mind.

After her breakfast she felt somewhat better. When Mrs. Chickby left her alone again the idea of escape again asserted itself and she, for the second time, made examination of the windows. While she was engaged in this there came another rap at the door.

When it opened Ralph Kilburn crossed the threshold. A sick, suffocating sensation came over Stella and she drew back, pale, and, for a moment, weak.

But only for a moment, then her courage returned and she gazed scornfully at her persecutor. Kilburn was the soul of urbanity and entered with a bland smile.

"Well, my little beauty," he said ardently, "have you tined down any since I saw you last? Or are you yet inclined to believe me an ogre?"

Stella could hardly speak so indignant was she. She gazed at the villain with almost crushing intensity, and said:

"You are a cowardly specimen of a man Ralph Kilburn. No, I have not relaxed my hatred of you in the least, and can only say that you shall suffer for this outrage."

Kilburn laughed contemptuously.

"Words won't make me," he said persuasively. "And I cannot see what other weapons you have to fight with. You will find before the end comes that it will be much better for you to yield gracefully to my suit. Come now, be a little more civil to me at least."



He advanced toward her as he spoke, as though he would take her in his arms. But she repelled him like a tigress.

"Stand back, Ralph Kilburn!" she cried in a ringing voice. "Don't put your hands upon me. I warn you."

"He yet defiant," he said in a tone of angry vexation. "Why will you be so obdurate. It is the act of an unwise woman."

"You will find that I will hold out to the last," said Stella with spirit.

"Why do you treat me so much like a dog?" said Kilburn in a conciliatory tone. "Come let us compromise now. What have I done that you should be so hard on me?"

"Wait, Ralph Kilburn," said Stella with burning gaze, "what have you not done? What was the fate of Edward Maxwell? I know that at he was stricken down at my side. Did you do him harm? Tell me the truth!"

Kilburn gave a violent start. The query was so sudden that it somewhat disconcerted him, and it was a minute before he could reply.

"Never mind Maxwell," he said brutally. "He wont bother me any more. At least he will never make you his wife."

"He was my betrothed husband," said Stella intensely. "And you have done him harm. I can read it in your guilty face, Ralph Kilburn; you have killed him!"

"Killed him!" ejaculated the villain. "That is a pretty steep declaration. Would you make me a murderer?"

"I know not what you are," said Stella with swelling bosom. "But you have the gifts of a murderer."

"You are complimentary."

The young girl here reeled back against the wall, her anguished soul giving forth a despairing cry.

"Oh God, they have killed him. My Edward, so noble and true. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

Kilburn regarded her with an evil sneer upon his face. After a while he advanced:

"Come now," he said, "try and get over it. It is not such a bad lot after all. I will do everything for you and supply you with all the luxuries money can procure. I have wealth. I will make a princess of you—"

He went no further. Stung beyond endurance, Stella turned upon him. All the venom of a deadly hatred was in her manner and voice as she cried vengefully:

"Never dare address me in this way again, Ralph Kilburn! I brand you with my hatred! You have crossed my life! You dare not deny that you have killed Edward Maxwell, and if I know that such is the truth, I swear it, weak woman that I am; *your life shall expiate the crime, for I will kill you!*"

## CHAPTER X.

### HOWARD'S DILEMMA.

DAN HAYES had been assiduously at work. He had scoured the city in vain for a clew by which to solve the problem of the mysterious disappearance of Stella Lord.

Poor Edward Maxwell was able to be out, but he was a pitiful sight.

He was no longer the bright dashing fellow as before. He went about in a quiet way and seldom spoke, and then with a vacant smile. He would converse intelligently, but when questioned upon matters of the past, would press his hand to his head, and say with acute agony of spirit:

"I have lost it, I have lost it; no, I cannot tell."

Dr. Irish only shook his head, sagely, and continued his treatment.

"I cannot tell," he said, "I may be able to restore him to mental health. I will try it."

The general sympathy was very strong for the young overseer. He was the recipient of all sorts of favors from all quarters.

Mrs. Lord was distraught with grief over the disappearance of Stella. She yet averred that

the young girl was in the river, though it was dragged and no trace of a body found.

The detective's hypothesis was different. He had acquired new ideas upon the subject and believed a solution was not far distant.

But as yet the matter was in a fog and developments came slowly.

But one day as Dan was going along the street he heard a familiar voice and looked down into a little begrimed face at his side.

"Bet yer boots I've found yer, Dan Hayes! Hold on! I want to give yer a clew, as ther feller said in the detective story."

"Davy!" ejaculated Dan. "Well, my boy, what is it?"

It was indeed the little bootblack. He had found his way home from Lawrence all right, as the detective had believed he would. Dan was at once interested and listened to what the lad had to say.

"I lost yer in Lawrence," said Davy. "Where did yer go to?"

"I followed Flanagan aboard the train and came to Lowell," said Dan. "I knew you had a ticket home and would be all safe."

"Oh, you bet!" said the little bootblack. "That's all right. It ain't the first time I've been to Lawrence. I don't find any fault. But yer didn't catch Flanagan?"

"No," said Dan, "I am sorry to say that I did not."

"Well, that's a hard case," said Davy, lugubrically. "He is a slick one, ain't he? But Stella Lord, ain't yer looking fer her?"

"Yes," said Dan. "Can you give me any clew?"

"Well, I dunno," said Davy, scratching his head a moment. "Pears like as I can recollect what a chum told me which makes me think—but mebbe it wasn't the same girl—what do yer think?"

"Tell me about it," said Dan with a smile. "Where does your chum live?"

"He lives on Davidson street," said Davy meditatively, "and he climbed out of his window onto a roof to see the bridge burn. While he was there he seen a boat come around the corner into the Concord river."

"A boat?"

"Yes," continued Davy. "Ther boat came up ther river and landed right down below his house. He seen two men lift a woman, that he said was either sick or drunk, he didn't know which, out of the boat, and take her to a carriage on Davidson street. Then they drove away. By gum! there can't be anythin' wrong about that, can there?"

Dan gave a violent start. In an instant a revelation burst upon him like a thunder clap. A sudden probable truth flashed through his mind with crushing force.

"Can it be?" he ejaculated, and then he seized Davy's arm: "Are you sure of this, Davy?" he queried. "What is yur chum's name?"

"Tim Mooney," said Davy. "He lives in a house on Davidson street, that looks right over the Concord river."

"The mystery is explained," said Dan to himself. "Now I can see it all. Rascality was indeed at work. Stella Lord has been abducted. That is the long and short of it. They were going through the bridge, and were set upon by rascals. Maxwell was left for dead, and the bridge set afire to cover the deed. I can see it all now."

He remained a moment apparently in silent thought, and then seeing Davy gazing wistfully up into his face, said:

"You are sure that your friend has told you the truth, Davy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he know the carriage driver?"

"Well, I axed him that," said the lad doubtfully, "but he said he couldn't tell sure, but thought it looked like Maguire."

"Maguire," mused Dan, "yes, he is just the man for such a job. But who can the abductors be? What is their purpose, and where have they taken her? I will find out."

Then to the boy: "I want you to keep your eyes open around town, and when you find anything new, come and let me know it. You have put me on a good scent this time. I can depend on you?"

"Bet yer boots yer can!" said Davy, sincerely. "I'll see ye again, Dan."

And with this he vanished in the crowd. Dan turned in an opposite direction, but he had not gone far when a man emerged from the shadow of a doorway where he had been standing, and from which he had heard the conversation entire.

It was Stub Howard.

The gambler gazed after Dan darkly, and muttered:

"Aha! I'm just in time to spoil that little game, Mister Detective. Well, now, perhaps fortune has not played the game well into my hands. If I don't spoil it, then my name ain't Howard. Won't it be a pretty pickle? That confounded Maguire will be bulldozed into telling everything. The only thing I can do is to act."

He struck out down the street at once. A few moments later he went into Atkin's stable and ordered a fleet horse and buggy.

He drove directly to Belvidere, but failed to find Kilburn.

For a moment he was undecided. But only for a moment. Then he concluded to assume all responsibility.

"If that detective learns all from Maguire," he said, reflectively, "he will go to Chickby's at once. If he finds the girl there, all is up. The best thing I can do is to go there at once and have the girl taken to safer quarters."

Without further hesitation, he started upon his errand. But passing beyond Nesmith street, he came into the verge of Tewksbury, and met a man approaching him at a leisurely gait.

In an instant Howard had recognized him and drew up his horse. It was Flanagan.

"Well, I'm beat!" said Howard, with a coarse laugh. "Yer dodged 'em after all, didn't yer, Jack?"

"Well, you bet!" said Flanagan, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "But where are you going, Stub?"

"To Andover; want to ride?"

"Don't care if I do."

And Flanagan climbed into the carriage. Stub gave the horse the whip, and dashed away down the road at a lively gait.

When Dan Hayes started down the street he had two purposes in view. The first he proceeded to carry out.

He visited Mrs. Lord at her house at once. When he was face to face with her, he said:

"Mrs. Lord, I want you to answer me a question. Did your daughter have any other admirers besides Maxwell?"

"No, sir," said Mrs. Lord vigorously; "she was true to Edward."

"That is not the idea," said Dan "I have no doubt of that, but if she had an admirer—that is what I mean—who was he?"

"An admirer?" repeated Mrs. Lord. "Oh yes, all the young men seemed to admire Stella. I don't think of any particular one unless it was Ralph Kilburn who asked her to marry him."

"Kilburn!" ejaculated Dan; "she did not favor his suit?"

"No sir."

"That is enough," said Dan, "I have heard all I desire to know." He went back to the city at a rapid pace, all doubt was settled in his mind. It was as he had surmised, Kilburn was at the bottom of all.

"He has taken a thorny path," said Dan mentally. "But I am dazed at the recklessness of his course and the enormity of his misdeeds. He is a bridge burner and an abductor, perhaps a murderer."

His mind was now made up as to what course he should pursue.

He at once sought out Maguire, the hack driver. Slapping the fellow upon the shoulder



he said: "Look here Maguire, do you want a term in the state prison?"

The hack driver gave a terrible start of alarm and gazed at Dan in a frightened way.

"Of course I don't," he said.

"Then tell me the truth. What were you doing on Davidson street the night of the bridge fire?"

The fellow gazed vacantly at Dan.

"I was not on Davidson street that night," he said.

"Don't lie to me," said Dan severely.

"The next time will be your last. I know that you were on Davidson street that night. Where did you take those men and that girl?"

The detective's gaze penetrated the fellow's very soul. He saw that there was no use to a tincture of concealment so he said:

"I took them down in Andover to a farm house."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes."

"Who were they?"

"I don't know."

And Maguire stuck to this stoutly. The detective could not shake him upon this point, and finally desisted, saying:

"Well, Maguire, I want you to go with me directly to that house. Put your horses to their best speed."

With this he sprang into the fellow's hack. Maguire did as was directed, and drove out upon the Andover road.

Not daring to disobey his orders, he took the most direct route that he knew of for the Chickby's farm.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FLANAGAN INTERCEDES IN STELLA'S BEHALF.

It was an intensely dramatic declaration that Stella flung into her enemy's face, and Ralph Kilburn saw at once that he had more of a will to contend with than he had at first supposed.

It was not going to be so easy, after all, to tame his prize, and he was sorely in doubt as to what course to pursue.

Then his brutal nature asserted itself.

"All right," he thought. "It will avail nothing to attempt coaxing. Nothing but force will do it, and she shall come to my terms."

He moved toward the door, saying: "All this is very dramatic, Stella, but it won't help you. It would be better policy for you to come down from your high horse. I am not afraid of you. You cannot intimidate me. You are thoroughly in my power, and I will break your will at any cost."

Stella was by no means appeased in anger by this declaration. Her whole form quivered.

"Oh, if I could be a man, but for a moment," she said bitterly, "I would teach you a lesson in humility, Ralph Kilburn, that you would not soon forget. But no; I am designed by fate a weak woman, and this is why you dare to oppress me."

"I am coming again in a few days," said Kilburn mockingly, as he stood on the threshold. "In the meantime keep up your courage. When I come I will bring a minister who will make us one."

"Never!" cried Stella forcibly.

But the door closed behind his mocking laugh, and he was gone. Stella was now almost overwhelmed with despair. She sank into a chair, crying bitterly:

"Oh, why should this be my cruel fate? After all that has been, why am I consigned to this?"

It seemed more than her heart could bear, this weight of grief, and she broke down and obbed like a child.

The relaxation had come, and her vaunted bravery of a moment before was gone.

The few days that ensued seemed to her, in her captivity, like years. She had tried all human methods of escape. She had endeavored to force the windows. But they resisted her efforts. She had appealed to Sarah

Chickby, and even to Chickby himself. But they were both obdurate. All hope seemed lost.

"Oh, will no one come to my relief?" she cried in anguish. "Oh, Father in heaven! am I doomed to this?"

For the thousandth time she went to the window and peered out and up the country road.

And this time a team was in sight. It was coming to the farm. Was it, could it be rescuers?

A wild hope sprung up in her bosom. She watched the team as it drew nearer.

It was rapidly driven, and drew up in the yard. She experienced a wild thrill, and waited eagerly to see who should alight.

But alas! It was not a friend who clambered out of the vehicle. It was Stub Howard himself, and he was accompanied by a man whom Stella had never seen before. This was Flanagan.

She drew back from the window with a feeling of dread fear. Why this was she knew not. She heard Howard rap at the farm-house door. Then she heard voices.

"What is it you, Howard?" said Chickby's voice. "What the devil has brought you back here?"

"I ain't got no time to fool, Chick," said Howard, anxiously. "Where's the gal?"

"She's up stairs."

"I want her."

"What?"

"That's what I said."

"What do yer want of her?" said Chickby, doubtfully.

"I'm going to take her away."

"To take her away?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it ain't safe to leave her here," said Howard, impatiently. "Come, fetch her down here."

"And why ain't it safe?" said Chickby reluctantly. "There ain't been nobody here."

"That's all right," said Stub, "but there'll be somebody here soon. That cursed detective, Dan Hayes, has got ahold of us, and you bet I had to come here post haste."

"So yer going ter take her away," said Chickby. "Well, where will yer take her?"

"I don't know, nor ain't got no time to answer questions," said Howard. "Come, hustle, old man, and fetch her down."

"Well, I don't know," said Chickby, doubtfully. "I ain't had no orders from the boss to that effect. What if he says no, what then?"

"There ain't no boss about it," said Howard angrily. "The question is, will you fetch that gal down, or not?"

Chickby was silent a moment.

"No," he finally replied.

"You won't?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I ain't had orders."

"Then I'll go up and get her," said Howard. "Get out of my way!"

But Chickby stood in the door barring passage. A crisis seemed at hand when a team drove quickly into the yard and two men leaped out. One of these was Ralph Kilburn. He approached the house and gazed at Stub with astonishment.

"Why, Stub," he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

"He is trying to take away the gal," said Chickby. "I knew it wasn't right, so I wouldn't let him. It's a good thing you've come."

"This man is a fool," said Stub angrily.

"You see, Kilburn, I've found out that Dan Hayes is going to spring a trap on us. He has got around Maguire, the hack driver, and is on to our racket. I went to your house and couldn't find you, so I shouldered the responsibility and came here to get the girl and take her somewhere else. It ain't safe for her to stay here."

Kilburn was electrified at this.

"Dan Hayes!" he ejaculated. "Has that sleuth hound got hold of our racket? Then all is lost."

"Not yet," said Stub. "We can get the girl away from here in time."

"Yes," admitted Ralph excitedly. "But that won't clear us. If he knows that it is us, all is up."

"Well—did I not act right?" queried Howard.

"Yes," said Kilburn, "but are you not premature? Is Dan Hayes on the way here?"

"He won't be long in coming," affirmed Stub. "I wouldn't waste no time, but get the girl out of here."

"Not yet," said Kilburn, "I've got a little ceremony to perform first."

With this he turned to his companion who was a tall man with a sandy complexion, and the appearance more of a newspaper scribe than aught else. Yet Stub received a shock of surprise as Kilburn presented him to this individual, saying:

"This is the Rev. James Winter, Mr. Howard. He will perform the ceremony which will make Stella Lord and your humble servant, husband and wife."

Stub gazed at the averred divine a moment, in an astonished way. What caused this was the lack of clerical dignity the latter wore.

Also this was considerably heightened when the divine tipped him a comprehensive wink as he took his hand, saying:

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Howard. Always happy to grasp a brother's hand."

"Brother," gasped Howard, "Jimmy Winter—you in ecclesiastical robes? All but the robes though."

"Sh—" said the sophisticated Winter. "Go easy, stubborn lad. This is only one of my multifarious ways of earning a pass to the road of wealth. By the way, can't I get your subscription to the Weekly Clarion, the greatest family paper of the age? Oh, it don't matter, you know. I would pass for a minister in a crowd, wouldn't I? Well, if I don't tie the knot good and strong, then my name isn't Jimmy Winter."

"Go in and win," said Stub, who was deeply impressed with the sublimity of the affair. "I'll bet on you."

All this while Flanagan had been standing in the background. Winter and Stub had conducted their conversation aside, but Kilburn had been talking with Chickby.

Now Kilburn said impatiently:

"Come, we might as well open the ball now as later. Let me see, you, Stub, can be witness and—"

Kilburn glanced at Flanagan. It was a signal for Stub, and he proceeded to introduce the cracksman to the others.

This ceremony concluded, the Reverend(?) Mr. Winter in a solemn voice announced that he was ready and produced a bible. All entered the house.

Poor Stella in her prison chamber had been watching affairs from the window above.

Now as she saw them enter the house, she apprehended the result. But she was resolved to be strong and did not flinch when the door of the chamber opened and all entered.

She regarded them with curling lip and flashing eyes. Chickby advanced first, and said:

"Mr. Kilburn has brought the Rev. Mr. Winter with him, who will perform the marriage ceremony."

"Marriage ceremony," said Stella indignantly. "Does he think to force me to such a step?"

"Come, Stella," said Kilburn, in his villainous, insinuating way, "do be reasonable. It will be of no use for you to fight this thing off any longer. You must submit to my terms."

"You may kill me first," said Stella angrily.

All gazed at the young girl with undisguised admiration. Flanagan stood in the background



in a reticent way. Chickby was officious and Howard watched proceedings with interest.

The Reverend Mr. Winter, so-called, opened his book, and drawing his face down to a sanctimonious expression, began to read in a sonorous voice:

"In the days of Moses there went up from the land of Nod—see here, bring the girl up here, Kilburn, if you want me to hitch you to her. You must bear in mind that the marriage ceremony is one of the holiest and most sacred of bonds in this life. Come up—come up here, if you want to get hitched."

Kilburn sprang forward and seized Stella's wrist. After vainly endeavoring to exhort her to come up to the impromptu altar, he attempted to drag her forward.

"Confound you," he said in a passion, "you are too obstinate."

But Stella resisted most stoutly. She indeed battled so well that Kilburn was unable to bring her forward. The Reverend Mr. Winter affected to ignore all at first, but now looked over his spectacles in a shocked way.

"Ah," he said, "you are taking great chances, friend Kilburn. If she is as stubborn as this now, what will she be after marriage?"

A laugh was created by this sally, and Kilburn began to realize that his position was rather ridiculous.

He felt this sensibly, and also that he was losing ground. It angered him, and he said: "Stub, take hold of her."

"Release me," cried Stella, desperately, "I will die before I will submit, Ralph Kilburn."

"Drag her up," cried Kilburn.

Howard, who was just brute enough, sprang forward and rudely grasped Stella's arm. She could not struggle against such strength, and was dragged forward.

Her hair was dishevelled, and one sleeve torn off in the struggle, displaying her bare, plump arm. Her manner was that of wild terror and desperation.

"Oh, help me—help!" she cried in anguish, "will no one help me? In this place is there not one gentleman? Oh, will you stand by and see this outrage carried out. If you are men, if you have a heart, you will save me from this villain."

"Go on with the ceremony, parson," said Kilburn, breathless with the struggle, "hurry up with it."

Once more the Reverend Mr. Winter opened his book and began to read. Kilburn answered the first question in the affirmative. But Stella would not speak.

In vain she was commanded to do so. She would not open her lips. Kilburn was infuriated.

"Curse you!" he cried brutally, "you shall do as I say. Open your mouth now. Hold her Stub; I'll open it for her."

The villain seized Stella by the back of the neck and placed his thumbs back of her jaws. By bringing a powerful pressure there with the intent of opening her mouth he wrung a cry of agony from her white lips.

Already she was fast succumbing to exhaustion. Her face was pallid and it was evident that she was upon the verge of fainting.

The pinnacle of the exhibition of barbarity had been reached. It was time for reaction. Back of all the cracksmen Flanagan had watched all, but had not sought to interfere.

But now he stepped forward and flung Stub Howard aside like a reed. Then he seized Stella's tottering form and placed her behind facing Kilburn with a glaring light in his eyes.

"Enough," he said in tones of thunder. "I don't like this circus, and I don't want ye to bother this little gal any more."

"You?" cried Kilburn in astonishment. "Stand out of the way. What are you doing with that girl?"

"That's none of yer business," said the king of cracksmen. "Take the warning. Keep off."

But Kilburn was reckless and clutched Flanagan. Before he knew it he was flung across the room. He was no match for the powerful man. He did not return to the attack. Stella who knew she had a champion drew a deep breath of relief. Nobody seemed inclined to dispute Flanagan's strange and unlooked-for deal.

"Do you mean this, John Flanagan?" said Kilburn with surprise. "I didn't think you was the kind of a man."

"John Flanagan ain't mealy-mouthed about bustin' a bank or breakin' a safe," said the cracksmen in his off hand way, "but he ain't the kind of man to oppress the wimmen and children. He's a jail bird and there's a price on his head, but he don't trample on wimmen. I'm goin' ter tell you what you are Mr. Ralph Kilburn. Yer ain't a villain becase yer ain't smart enough. Yer a dirty, sneakin' yaller cur and if yer so much as raise a whimper agin this pooty little girl again, as sure as my name is John Flanagan, I'll sk n ye. That's my word, John Flanagan every time, and I want the world to know, that, bad man as I am, I never raised my hand agin a woman."

## CHAPTER XII.

### AGAIN IN THE TOILS.

The declaration of Bad Man Flanagan impressed all who heard it. The villains, Howard and Kilburn, were discomfited and to say the least, displeased.

But neither exactly cared to dispute the pass with Flanagan. His reputation as a man of grit was of no ordinary sort, and they knew that he would not hesitate to keep his word.

Particularly Stub Howard, who was one of the lower class of villains, feared the cracksmen. But Kilburn was more diffident than his colleague.

Chickby, who feared a crisis, had sought the door. The Rev. Mr. Winter seemed impressed with the turn affairs had taken, and now made a break himself.

In a remarkably short space of time the tables turned. It seemed that forlorn little Stella was not without a champion at last.

Winter flung his book down and said forcibly:

"Hang me for a herring, but I don't like this business myself. It ain't right to bulldoze the girl into such a stinking mean affair. I thought you told me, Ralph Kilburn, that the girl would come to time."

"And she would," said Kilburn with a scowl, "if it hadn't been for this interference. I shall remember this in you, John Flanagan!"

The cracksmen only laughed at this idle threat.

"You don't need to be afeard, lady," he said to Stella reassuringly, "I'll see that ye ain't harmed."

Then to Kilburn he said:

"You go home to yer father. If yer don't, the first thing yer know yer won't know anything. Stub Howard, can't you keep better company? Fough!"

This maddened Kilburn beyond endurance. But, before he could retort, Chickby rushed into the room, crying:

"Hustle, all of ye! There's a team coming into the yard and Dan Hayes is in it!"

The effect was startling. Flanagan alone stood his ground. The others fled precipitately.

The team which had just driven into the yard was indeed Dan Hayes and Maguire. They had reached the Chickby homestead at a critical moment.

At the name of Dan Hayes, a cry of joy escaped from Stella's lips and she sprang to the window. Then Flanagan disappeared from the room.

Where he went nobody ever knew. But he absented himself in his usual mysterious way. It was probable that he made his escape by means of a back entrance.

As for the Rev. Mr. Winter, he unfortunately was the first to take the alarm and ran out into the yard and into Dan Hayes' arms.

But Stub Howard and Kilburn did not follow him. They were too shrewd and assisted Chickby to bar and barricade the door.

Then a sudden idea had occurred to Kilburn. He imparted it to Howard hastily.

So far as opposition was concerned the field was clear. Flanagan had made off by a rear way. His interference was disposed of.

"Have you got a drug?" queried Kilburn of Stub.

"Yes," replied that worthy, "why do you ask?"

"Get it ready."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to give this detective the slip."

"But the drug?"

"I'm going to take it with me to dose the girl. Oh, no, I've not given her up yet."

The two villains exchanged glances. In an instant the feasibility of the thing dawned upon both. They were not slow to act.

They were aided by several important facts.

One was that a rear entrance existed to the house which communicated with a road across the fields. By means of this road they could reach the Andover highway at another point.

Stub's team had been taken by Chickby upon his arrival to the rear of the house. This was a fortunate fact. It required but a few moments' quick work to effect the deed.

While Dan was kept busy with the *pseudo* Rev. Mr. Winter at the front door, all could be done.

It is needless to say that they were quick to act.

Up stairs they sprang. Stella was at the window and looked up as they appeared. Before she could hardly make an outcry they had seized and gagged her.

It was but a moment's work to transport the helpless young girl to the rear entrance to the house and into the buggy. Whip was given to the horse and they dashed away across the fields at a breakneck pace. Once more Stella Lord was in the enemy's power. This time it seemed that she would be unable to withstand their villainous plans.

Meanwhile Dan Hayes had clutched Winter upon emerging from the door of the farmhouse.

The *pseudo* divine endeavored to free himself from the detective's grasp, but vainly.

"What's this?" cried Dan, keeping a firm hold of Jimmy. "What are you doing here, Wint'?"

"I—I—that is—why, it's you, Dan Hayes. Thank heaven I am safe! Oh, I was never so frightened in my life!"

Jim was quick witted and had hit upon an expedient plan out of the difficulty. The detective had never known any harm of him, so smiled as he queried:

"What's the matter, Jimmy? What are you doing here?"

"Doing here?" reiterated the breathless Jimmy. "Well, I never got into so hot a hole in my life. I tell you, they've a lot of roughs in that house. I thought they'd club me. What am I doing here? Oh, absolutely nothing wrong. I only went in to solicit a subscription for the Weekly Clarion, the greatest paper in the world. Oh, no, never mind, I'm quite content to go home now."

"Who is in there?" queried Dan, sharply, but with an amused smile.

"I dunno," said Jimmy, with a slight twinge of conscience at the falsehood. "It don't matter. Don't you go in there. It's no place for an honest man. See this team? Well, it's my team, and I'm going back to the editor of the Clarion, and tell em they'll have to send John L. Sullivan down here. Look out for 'em, Dan, look out for 'em. Good-bye."

With this, the shrewd fellow climbed into



the team in which Kilburn and himself had driven up, and giving the horse the rein, dashed away. The detective did not restrain him, for he knew him to be generally honest, and did not regard him with suspicion.

And Jimmy put the whip to the horse and sped homeward as fast as possible, improving every moment in inward congratulations upon his escape, and a mental resolution never to get caught in such a scrape again.

And to the author's best knowledge, he never has been.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### DAN HAYES TO THE RESCUE.

The villains, Howard and Kilburn, had successfully carried out their nefarious scheme and the rescue, which had seemed so near at hand, had been denied unfortunate Stella Lord. With the gag in her mouth it was impossible to speak and she was held so firmly by Howard that she could not get away. She was hopelessly a captive.

When Dan Hayes finally effected an entrance into the Chickby house, he found only the Chickbys there. Maguire awaited him upon his coach without the yard.

It did not require but a few moments' research to satisfy Dan that he had been outwitted.

After threatening the Chickbys with condign punishment for the part they had taken in the affair, Dan did not waste time in the vicinity. There was but one course left to him: pursuit.

Accordingly he returned to the carriage and instructed Maguire to take the road towards Andover, after having forced the confession from Chickby that the side road taken by the captors led eventually out upon the main highway.

He did this with a view to cutting them off in their flight. Maguire, who was as contented to work for one master as another, so long as he was well paid, did not demur, but picked up the reins and drove away at full speed.

In fear of Dan's threat the Chickbys that very day de-camped for parts unknown, and no one in the vicinity has ever seen them since.

And down the road went the coach at a rapid speed.

Dan kept a close watch ahead and, as the miles sped by, he began to entertain doubts as to his being upon the right track.

But he was enabled to satisfy this doubt a little later, when they met a team upon the road, driven by a farmer, who informed them that he had met a team answering the description given.

But, according to this man, the captors of sweet Stella Lord had taken a branch road which led towards Salem.

When he arrived at the forks of this road, Dan therefore instructed Maguire to take it.

Meanwhile Howard and Kilburn with Stella firmly gagged, had driven with all speed upon the Salem road, neither speaking a word for ten miles. Then a serious obstacle to their further progress arose.

They had naturally surmised that Dan would pursue them and had kept a good watch in their rear.

But no sign of the pursuit had as yet appeared, and they were congratulating themselves upon this, when all at once a warning cry broke from Stub.

"Haul up!" he cried to Kilburn, who held the reins, "we are going to smash! Look out for it!"

In turning about at Chickby's, one of the wheels of the buggy had become cramped.

This had caused a loosening of the spokes in the hub, and now the wheel began to go, like the d-a-o-n's shay, "to pieces all at once." There was but one alternative, and that was to pull up. Kilburn did so and then looked out of the buggy.

They were in a precarious position now.

There was no way of proceeding with the broken wheel, and no visible means of mending it.

The location was in the heart of a thick patch of woods. It was probably a mile or more to the nearest house.

What was to be done? This was the query which agitated the minds of both, and they gazed, each at the other, for a moment, speechless.

Then Stub said:

"Well, we're in for it, ain't we?"

"I should say we were," said Kilburn.

"What can we do?"

Stub held Stella by the waist, her arms pinioned behind her back.

"The nearest house must be a mile away," said Kilburn, "and even if we get there, we may not be able to procure a carriage."

The position was, indeed, devoid of romance. But there was no other way to do, and, accordingly, they drew the buggy to one side of the road and proceeded on foot, Stub leading the horse, while Stella was forced to walk between them.

In this way they proceeded until a small, low-roofed farmhouse came in sight.

Then Kilburn sought the shelter of the roadside with Stella, while he admonished Stub to go on alone and endeavor to procure a carriage from the residents of the farmhouse.

When Stub reached the house, an old man came out, saying:

"How are ye, cap'n?" Broke down, I take it?"

"Yes," said Stub, "and it is a most unfortunate thing for me, as I am going home to the bedside of my dying wife in Salem. But I fear now that I shall be too late."

"That's hard," said the farmer. "As sure as my name is Jerry Jenkins, I'm sorry for ye! Where are ye from?"

"I am from Lowell."

"What's yer name?"

"Harry Smith."

"What? Any relation to Tom Smith, in the shoe business up there?"

"Yes, his own brother," cried Stub unblushingly.

"Tom's a dratted nice fellow," said Farmer Jenkins positively. "I'd be allus glad to do Tom a favor."

"Have you got a carriage I could hire, or buy of you?" said the shrewd villain. "I want to get home before my wife dies, if possible."

"Hev I?" said Jenkins thoughtfully, "well, jest hold on a minute. Are yer mighty pertickler what it looks like?"

"No," said Stub, eagerly.

"Well, now, I've got a shay, an' it's a good one; been in our family for twenty years. But I wouldn't let it to nobody."

"Then I'll buy it," said Stub. "What's your price?"

"No, yer won't," said Jenkins. "I won't sell it."

"Then it won't do me much good, will it?" said Stub disappointed.

"Yes, it will," said Jenkins, "for I'm going to lend it to ye. But I want yer to return it afore next Sunday, for the wimmen folks might want to go to church."

"I will," said Stub eagerly. "And I will return the favor if it ever comes in my way. But as I'm in a hurry, if I can hitch to it now, I'd like it."

"Sartin," said the farmer, going to his shed and opening a wide door. "Here she is: pull her out."

A high, old-fashioned chaise was in the shed. Stub did not wait to make an examination of it, but at once seized the shafts and hauled it out.

It was but a moment's work to hitch the horse into it. But, at the last moment, when the cunning rascal believed he had won his point, there came the sounds of a carriage far up the road.

Then he heard loud cries, which were com-

prehensive to him. It was Kilburn shouting to him. A pistol shot followed.

Stub excitedly sprang out into the road, as did Jenkins.

Far up the road was a close carriage, upon the seat of which was a driver, whip in hand.

In the road beside the carriage were two men struggling. Stub recognized both. It was Kilburn and Dan Hayes.

An uncontrollable terror seized Howard, and he did not wait to dispute the pass. To the astonishment of Jenkins, he sprang over a stone wall opposite and fled across the fields.

Dan had urged Maguire on to the greatest speed and they had gradually gained upon the fugitives. The breaking of the wheel settled the question.

When left alone with Stella, Kilburn had anxiously awaited the return of Stub Howard. Stella, meanwhile, had managed to loosen her bonds, and now at a favorable moment dropped them, and snatching the gag from her mouth sprang out into the road, screaming wildly.

Of course Kilburn sprang after her. But the girl was fleet of foot and gave the villain a hard chase down the road.

But the scoundrel gained upon her and, with a curse, was about to grip her shoulder when a team came dashing around a bend in the road.

It was a coach, and as it came up, before Kilburn could seize Stella and draw her out of sight, the door flew open and Dan Hayes sprang out.

In an instant things assumed a lively aspect. The detective made a rush for his man, crying:

"Ah, Ralph Kilburn, I have caught you at last!"

Kilburn was electrified at sight of the detective. It was such a surprise to him that he could not speak.

But as Dan rushed forward upon him, he recovered himself enough to act.

A revolver flashed in his hand and a loud report rang out.

Crack!

It was a fortunate thing for Dan that the aim was not true. The bullet flew wide of its mark and was the signal for a terrible struggle.

For Kilburn, now in the grip of the detective for the first time in his life, showed undaunted courage and maintained his position with a new born desperation. He knew that he was in for it, and fought nobly.

But he could no longer hope to bear up before the detective's superior strength and strategy. Almost before he knew it, he was placed *hors du combat* and Dan had slipped the twisters on his wrists. This enabled him to manacle him and thrust him into the carriage. Then he said, warningly:

"Do not attempt to move, Ralph Kilburn, or I will shoot you like a dog!"

There was no need of this warning. The villain was too thoroughly terrified to disobey, and sank back into the carriage.

"Where are the others?" queried Dan, turning to Stella.

"There is but one other," she replied, "and he has gone down the road."

Taking Stella in the carriage with him, Dan drove down to Farmer Jenkins' door, where he had a confab with that worthy which explained all to him.

Stub Howard had made good his escape. Dan did not attempt to pursue him, but, satisfied with his conquest, gave orders to Maguire to drive back to Lowell.

It was late that night when they arrived and a great sensation was created the next morning when all Lowell learned that the abductor of Stella Lord was the son of Lowell's magnate, President Kilburn of the Appleby bank.

As for Mrs. Lord, she was overwhelmed with joy at the restoration of her daughter Stella, and, for a moment, happiness was the lot of mother and daughter. But Stella was



almost prostrated with grief at the reported condition of Edward Maxwell, and hastened at once to visit him.

But, much to her anguish, the poor fellow did not recognize her. He only gave her a blank gaze which showed too plainly that his mental faculties were impaired. It was a sad thing indeed.

Dark were the clouds which now hung over the fortunes of those whom we have placed as the principal characters in our story. But the end was not yet. Thrilling developments were in store in the near future.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### KILBURN IS SENT TO JAIL.

Now that Stella Lord had been found, it was believed that she could throw light upon the mystery of the burning of Central bridge. But in this all were disappointed.

Her story revealed nothing beyond the fact that Kilburn and Stub Howard were her abductors.

Detectives were upon Stub's track everywhere. But the wily gambler kept out of the way.

Kilburn was remanded to jail. The effect of his arrest upon Mr. Kilburn was at first most severe. But he recovered from his grief to a certain extent, upon the strength of the old axiom that, "the devil's own is his own." It was useless for Ralph to look for help from his father this time.

Thus matters were, and the mystery of the bridge fire was as far from solution as ever.

There was nothing encouraging in the outlook for Dan Hayes. Never in his life had he been so completely baffled as he was upon this case.

Little Davy the bootblack, whom he chanced to meet on the street a few nights after, averred positively his belief that it was Flanagan and his pal who were the incendiaries.

But Dan was not prepared to accept this supposition yet, although he had been unable to force any confession from Kilburn, who was defiant in prison, or even any clue from Stella Lord's story, he was sanguine that Kilburn and Stub Howard were at the bottom of all.

And, with this belief, he worked night and day to track Howard, but thus far without avail.

Poor Edward Maxwell was believed to be the only person living who could shed light upon the mystery.

And he was in a condition which totally obviated this. The detective realizing this paid a visit to the doctor in charge, saying:

"Doctor, you must bring him through; all depends upon him. He can unravel all."

"I will do my best," said the astute man of medicine. "But, really, Mr. Hayes, I can give you very little hope."

This was not a flattering prospect, and yet Dan did not despair. Thus far, Ralph Kilburn had made no concession whatever. His implication in the bank robbery with Flanagan, for which the reward of five thousand dollars had been offered, was known to Dan and yet the detective had no means of establishing undisputable proof, and Kilburn, who was shrewd enough to recognize this truth, would advance nothing. As it was, all that he could be tried for in a court of justice was for assault upon Edward Maxwell, and the abduction of Stella Lord.

Stella had gone back to work in the mill. The circumstances of herself and mother had become somewhat straitened, and she was compelled to make an effort to overcome them.

To this end she was aided by kind friends in the mill, who made up a purse of fifty dollars and presented her with it. Stella's gratitude was profound and she was rendered very happy indeed.

The trial of Ralph Kilburn came off in due course of time and Dan worked hard to prove his guilt in connection with the bridge fire, but

in vain. The counsel for the guilty man worked his points shrewdly and managed to get his man off with a fine of one hundred dollars and two months imprisonment.

Ralph Kilburn smiled ironically as he was led from the court room to jail. He could afford to spend two months in jail with the surety of release at the expiration of that time.

His villainous plans were not yet quelled, by any means. His evil mind was busy with the future, when his sentence should expire.

His father took no notice of his appeal for aid, and publicly disowned his erring son. It is needless to say that Mr. Kilburn's heart was quite crushed with the weight of sorrow and disgrace.

After Kilburn was consigned to jail, Dan enjoyed a brief respite from his cares. Nothing new turned up for almost a month.

He had been quietly at work tracking Flanagan and Howard, but had failed to get trace of either. Edward Maxwell had now regained his physical health, but was yet laboring under his mental impairment. Stella remained devoted to him through all.

Thus matters were, when one day Dan was called to Tyngs Island, a pleasure resort in the Merrimack river, to look after a case of theft.

Commodore Pierce, the genial proprietor of the island, had lost a valuable horse by thieves, and it was suspected that a gang were in the vicinity of the island for the purpose of continuing their thieving operations.

Accordingly, Dan was sent for and responded at once.

Upon the banks of the Merrimack, at the head of Pawtucket falls, is the Vesper boathouse, owned by an organization of Lowell oarsmen. At this boathouse, Dan was met by Commodore Pierce and taken aboard the Pinafore, a large pleasure steamer which transported passengers to and from the island.

It was a beautiful sail to the island and arrived there, Dan was courteously shown about by Mr. Pierce.

A more lovely or desirable summer picnic ground than Tyngs Island in the Merrimack, can hardly be conceived. Swings, bowling alleys, a hotel, and conveniences for all athletic sports are there.

Dan accepted Mr. Pierce's hospitality and then gave his attention to the case in hand.

He reviewed the features of the theft, as rendered by Mr. Pierce, and made a close search of the island for other clues.

The only advantage he derived from this, was the lay of the land. He had donned a disguise and none in the crowd of picnickers who were present upon the occasion, recognized Dan Hayes the detective, in the rough clad countryman who lounged about the place.

Dan speedily arrived at a conclusion. This was that the thieves who were reputed to infest Tyngs Island, might be all concentrated in one person.

This person could have performed all of the marvelous deeds ascribed to a number. Moreover, Dan was convinced that this was the case, and that only one man was at the bottom of all.

Satisfied of this, he began immediately to look for that one man.

Before he had been upon the island two days, he struck a scent.

This was in the person of a short, stout-built man, with a bushy whiskered face and exceedingly lively manners. He seemed to form an almost immediate acquaintance and become the central attraction of almost every picnic party, though nobody knew his name.

A crowd of roughs were in the bowling alley and Dan at once hit upon his man foremost in this crowd. He was boisterously rolling balls with the others, who were nearly all intoxicated.

Dan concluded, after some while, that the best course he could pursue, was to make friends with this man, the suspected thief.

Accordingly he managed to get one of the

party into a conversation. Dan followed this up by feigning drunkenness, and by distributing a few cigars.

Then he was invited to join the game, which it need scarcely be said was a boisterous one. He did so, and for a while balls were rolled with varying effect at the ten pins at the other end of the alley. A few bets were made, and the party waxed more and more excited as time went on.

All this while Dan lost no opportunity to keep close watch of and size up his man. He was completely satisfied that his suspicions were not without foundation, though he did not at once suspect the other's identity.

"Ten strike for our side," cried a coarse featured man, who had just finished rolling. "Hurrah! we'll knock ye out in quick time!"

"Will yer?" said the man who was the object of Dan's suspicions, "I don't believe yer will."

The game was soon finished, and resulted in a hollow victory for the other side.

The detective had been waiting for a desired opportunity, and now it had come. He was not slow to take advantage of it. He feigned disgust and anger, and walking up to his man, said:

"Look here, cap'n, what's yer name?"

"Eh?" said the other, regarding Dan contemptuously, "what's that to you?"

"Not much," said Dan, "but I only wanted yer handle, that's all. But it don't matter, Mr. What's-er-name. I'll roll you out in three trials, highest run to count for ten dollars. You claim to be a player. Now put up or shut up."

The other looked at Dan craftily. The detective's feigned tipsiness deceived him.

"My name is Sam Dunn," he said, "and I'll take yer offer."

"Put up yer money," said Dan, assuming recklessness. "And when I'm 'done' with yer, yer name'll be 'Dunn' up or yer'll be 'done' yerself. Put up."

A bystander held the money. Dan rolled first and made a ten strike. Dunn followed with only ten. Dan made but five the next time, and Dunn followed with two ten strikes and made the money. With a yell of triumph, Dunn pocketed the stakes.

"Come on, boys," he cried, "it's my treat. Drinks for the crowd."

The crowd roared, and all made a rush for the bar. But the detective had made a startling discovery, and he did not wait further.

His game with Dunn had brought him closely in contact with him. This had revealed a thrilling fact.

He did not waste time, but made a decisive move. Stepping forward, and before Dunn knew what he was doing, he gave his black beard a quick twitch.

It separated quite easily from the other's face and left him beardless before the detective, revealing the fact that he had been wearing a disguise. The beard was false.

And, as the man Dunn now stood revealed, he was easily recognized by Dan.

"Stub Howard!" cried the detective. "At last, I have found you!"

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### HOWARD'S ARREST.

It was a most startling metamorphosis, and those who witnessed it gazed on with astonishment. Probably the most surprised of all was Howard, for it was he.

"Dan Hayes!" he gasped, for he now, for the first time, recognized the detective. "I have been sold. How did you know me?"

"The way of the transgressor is hard," said Dan grimly. "I think your race is nearly run, Stub Howard. Put on these bracelets."

Dan produced manacles as he spoke. There was no help for it, and Howard reluctantly allowed the detective to clasp them about his wrists.

"The game is up," he said sullenly, "but yer had quite a chase to find me out."



Dan did not deign to reply, but led his man to the hotel, where an excited crowd gathered. Commodore Pierce came out, and was surprised to see Dan with his man already captured.

"I've got him, Ed," he said. "Now, if you'll hitch up the Pinafore, I'll take him down to Lowell. I don't believe he'll steal any more horses from you."

"Dan, you're entitled to a diploma," said the facetious commodore. "You have done me a great favor. If you will step into my office in Lowell, at any time, I will give you a free pass over all the extensive lines of the Merrimack River Steamboat, Navigation and R. R. Company."

"I beg off," said Dan deprecatingly. "Don't be so hard on me, commodore, you are taking an undue advantage of me, for you must know it is impossible for a detective to take a pleasure trip. Moreover, your offer is too munificent a reward, and if I should accept the money which would accrue from the sale of that pass, it would so belittle my present profession as detective that I fear I should be unable to attend to its plebeian duties further."

"Upon that consideration alone, I will retract my offer," said the generous and accommodating commodore. "I recognize the irreparable loss to fame of the blotting out of the name of Detective Dan Hayes from her escutcheon. But you are always welcome to Tyngs Island, Dan, and bring your family."

Dan gracefully acknowledged Mr. Pierce's kindness and then boarded the steamer. An hour and a half later, Stub Howard was behind the bars.

And so completely dejected was the villain, that he broke down completely and made a confession to Dan of the facts pertaining to the robbery of the Appleby bank, in which Kilburn and Flanagan were associated.

This was another signal triumph for Dan, and he persisted in his questioning:

"Now, who set the bridge on fire?" he queried sharply.

Howard was very pale, but he only gazed blankly at the detective and said:

"I don't know."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes."

"Were you not in the bridge foot-walk a few minutes before the breaking out of the fire?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anybody there?"

"No."

"You struck Maxwell over the head, did you not?"

"I did," replied Howard.

"What did you do with him, then? Throw him into the river?"

"What! Don't you know?" said Howard in astonishment. "Didn't he tell you how it was done?"

"No," said Dan, "he has been out of his head since. But you can tell me now."

"There is no harm in telling," said Howard, and at once he proceeded to detail to the detective the full particulars of his disposition of Maxwell after the assault.

Dan listened with interest. After Howard had finished, he again attempted to force him to the confession of the bridge incendiarism, but without avail.

Dan left the cell in which Howard was confined, and then bethought himself of Kilburn. A new case would now be brought against the erring young man for complicity in the bank robbery.

And as this occurred to him, a most startling thought flashed over him. He drew a memorandum from his pocket.

"The sentence of Ralph Kilburn, of two months to jail, will expire the 23d day of October, at 4 p. m."

"This is the very day," muttered Dan, consulting his watch. "Great heavens! he must have been set free, for it is now five minutes after four."

Dan was thrown into a state of the most intense excitement. There was no time to lose. He must proceed to the jail at once.

Accordingly he started up the street. But he had not gone far when he saw a light buggy and a bay horse approaching.

A man was in the buggy. To Dan he was familiar. It was Sheriff Cushing.

In a moment Dan had hailed the sheriff, and cried:

"Mr. Cushing, you have a man by the name of Kilburn up there, whose sentence expires at four o'clock today."

"Yes," replied the sheriff, "but he is gone. I liberated him ten minutes ago."

"Too late!" cried Dan.

The sheriff drove on, and Dan stood a moment on the sidewalk in indecision.

Then he entered an office near by and telephoned to the police station to have men sent out on the search, and at once took the trail himself.

But, after his liberation from the jail, Ralph Kilburn mysteriously disappeared. It was supposed that he had shrewdly guessed his peril and improved the opportunity to skip.

However this was, not the least trace of him could be found anywhere, despite the most thorough search.

Had Dan been other than the plucky, determined man that he was, he would have been discouraged. But he maintained his persistent course despite all.

Various were the theories as to Kilburn's whereabouts. Dan had never credited him with great shrewdness and had not believed it possible that the villain could cover up his tracks so well.

And now there arose, and was widely circulated, a report that Bad Man Flanagan was at the bottom of all and was shielding Kilburn.

The mysterious cracksmen had not been seen or heard of since his championing of Stella at the home of the Chickbys. But that he was ever hovering about Lowell in clever disguise was patent.

Dan was inclined to credit this report, and at once began to look up Flanagan. But the wily cracksmen kept easily aloof.

At the last moment—the eleventh hour, as it were—when Dan Hayes felt sure that his greatest case was upon the eve of completion, he had lost the most important grip of all, the remaining link in the uncompleted chain of evidence was wrested away from him.

With Kilburn and Howard both in jail, an encouraging prospect of Edward Maxwell's recovery, and ultimately his evidence, he would have felt quite sure of the solution of the affair.

As the case stood now he was inclined after all to accept Davy the Kid's positive belief that Flanagan was the man who had set the bridge on fire.

He hunted up the bootblack and held a conference with him.

"You have not seen anything of Flanagan lately, have you?" said Dan.

"Can't say I have, boss," said the lad. "But great Mollyhorns! if you expect to catch him you ain't goin' to do it in daylight. He works after dark, you know. But look here, are yer onto the new dive?"

"Dive! No; where is it?"

A bootblack has an excellent opportunity to ferret out places of a questionable character, or even identify suspicious characters. Dan knew this, and this is why he had placed so much credence in little Davy's judgment.

"I'll go broke if it ain't a good un," said the lad. "Dyer know where Market and Salem street runs together?"

"Yes," replied Dan.

"Well, it's right near there, Sim Goldberry, that's the cove's name what keeps it. It looks like and has license for a pawn shop, but it's a lollypop dive, you bet! Why ain't ye caught onto it? Yer ain't up to the times."

This latter chaff Dan took good naturedly

Indeed his mind was so busy that he hardly noticed it.

"Who goes to Goldberry's?" he queried.

"All the boys. They say one man lost five hundred dollars in poker chips there t'other night," said Davy. "Bet yer life it's a good dodge ter look into. Yer might get a point there."

"Then you think we might strike Flanagan there?"

"Cert, or if you don't yer can r pe in some others. Nobody's licensed to run a gambling house in Lowell, are they?" queried Davy.

"Guess not," said Dan grimly. "Will you pilot me to this place, Davy?"

"Cert," said the bootblack; "bet yer boots I will! Come along."

Dan consulted his watch. It was fast growing dark. The street lights were beginning to shine out and he was struck with a sudden idea.

"Hold on, Davy," he said. "I suppose we may be a little early. They don't open up for gambling so early."

"Well, it would be better to go around an hour afore twelve o'clock," admitted the lad. "That's ther time to get 'em, you bet!"

"Then we will wait until then," said Dan. "Who is this Goldberry? Do you know him?"

"He's a sheeny," said Davy explicitly. "He's a kind of a Solomon-Levi-skin-ye-fer-half-a-dollar-feller."

"A Jew?" asked Dan.

"Mebbe," said Davy doubtfully. "I think he's a make-up, though. But you kin tell."

Dan was about to speak again when Davy clutched his hand. The bootblack was much excited and pointed to a man going across the street.

"There, d'yer see that man?" he cried. "Well, I think he is your man Flanagan dead ter rights. Shoot me fer a Phalanx target if it ain't. Sic him, Dan! S-s-sic him! You'll bag him sure this time."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### KILBURN'S TRIUMPH.

EDWARD MAXWELL had been left in a pitiable condition by his sickness. Indeed, even the most stony of hearts could not help but relax at sight of his pale and handsome face with its vacant expression.

He had been removed from his lodging house to the home of the Lords, and Stella gave him the utmost and the most sympathizing care. She was absent most of the day at her work in the mill, but at other times she was by the unfortunate youth's side.

She watched the progress of his malady with eager heart and noticed even the slight change for the better with increased confidence. Not once did hope of his ultimate recovery desert her.

It was an affecting sight, indeed, to see the tall, manly form bent and almost decrepit with a stupefied intellect. For poor Maxwell no longer went about with the straight, manly attitude that he had hitherto borne.

Every device that the human mind could devise was resorted to to enable him to recover his lost faculties. Hour after hour, Stella sat by his side and helped him to count pebbles, to trace lines upon a paper; anything that would aid to the collection and the concentration of his thoughts, with the hope of bringing his mind out from under the dark cloud. But everything seemed in vain. The doctor only shook his head gravely, saying:

"He may come out of it. But one thing that I know of would do it, and then all would depend upon existing circumstances. If he should receive a counter shock of extreme physical or mental intensity, it might set in motion the paralyzed machinery of the brain and he would be a sane man once more."

Stella, however, would not abandon hope. It was a period of great suffering to her, but she still clung to the drowning man's straw.

"Heaven will not be so cruel," she said.



"Oh, I know that he will overcome this spell. I have prayed, and I know that my prayers will be answered."

Of course it was a great drain upon their little store of earnings to have Edward there, but Stella would not hear of his removal to a hospital.

"I gave my heart to him in life," she said. "I will never take it back. If he dies he will carry it to the grave with him."

Such devotion was as rare as it was beautiful. Everybody became interested in the case and many were the kindly visits to the Lord cottage and pleasant the gifts of various sorts sent in by kind neighbors.

Had it not been for her lover's sad condition Stella would now have been one of the happiest of living mortals.

But the shadow was upon her and she could hardly bear a smile, but tenderly and sadly ministered to the wants of the one she loved.

Thus matters were when one day Stella read in the papers an account of the capture of Stub Howard, and also below it was the following, which caused her a dread thrill:

Stub Howard had hardly been confined when the detective, Dan Hayes, bethought him that as Kilburn's sentence expired at four o'clock that day, it behooved him to work quickly if he wished to effect his rearrest upon the new charge of implication with John Flanagan in breaking into the Appleby bank vaults, but unfortunately before the detective could reach the jail Sheriff Cushing had released his man upon the ground of expiration of sentence. Hayes has been busily searching for young Kilburn since, but has not yet effected his arrest.

The effect of this upon Stella was not pleasant. Now that Ralph Kilburn was at large she had fears that he might be tempted to renew his old plot of abducting and forcing her to a marriage with him. She did not feel secure.

But Mrs. Lord only treated this fear with skepticism.

"He will not dare to trouble us again," she said. "He will leave this part of the country with all haste, you may be sure."

But Stella did not feel quite easy in mind. A strange premonition, of what, she knew not, impressed her that a crisis was impending. And, sure enough, it came.

The cottage of the Lords was situated in a somewhat retired spot, and shrubbery hid it from the view of other houses. It was a beautiful location, but somewhat lonely, and many dark nights when mother and daughter were alone in the house they had quite naturally felt timidity.

Ralph Kilburn was deeply enamored of Stella Lord. He was a young man who let no obstacle stand in the way of the accomplishment of a desired end, and Stella knew this. This was why she felt fear.

He was now at large. To be sure he was pursued by the law, but this would not hinder him in the possible gaining of his ends. The young girl was well warranted in her fears.

That her suspicion was correct was demonstrated in a startling manner.

It was the supper hour and they were at table, when there came a sudden low rap upon the door. Mrs. Lord arose and glanced out of the window. A rough looking man stood upon the front step.

Stella suddenly acquired an uncontrollable fear, and clutched her mother's arm.

"Oh, mother," she said beseechingly, "I beg of you, do not go to the door. Oh, I know that man is a bad character and means us harm."

"Nonsense, child!" said Mrs. Lord; "it is only some hungry wanderer who is probably upon the verge of starvation. I cannot turn him away hungry."

But Stella could not overcome her fear. There was no doubt as to the stranger's profession. He was a tramp, his clothes were ragged and dirty, and his face concealed by a huge black beard.

Mrs. Lord disregarded Stella's admonition and went to the door. It was fast growing dusk without, and below, in the grove which intervened between the house and the river, the shadows were deep.

As Mrs. Lord opened the door, the tattered individual bowed low and said in a husky voice:

"If yez plaze, madam, could I ask a bit of sumthin' to eat? I'm that beat out with hunger that I can't walk any furder."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Lord, in her open-hearted way. "Where have you walked from to-day?"

"From Haverhill, mum. I'm lookin' for work in the mills."

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Lord sympathizingly. "Wait a moment, and I'll bring you out something."

Stella within the house was trembling with a fear which was not groundless. Mrs. Lord turned to enter the house.

As she did so, the opportunity was presented. Swiftly and silently the tramp stepped forward and dealt her a sudden sharp blow upon the head.

The blow was delivered with such force that the good woman was stricken down senseless. Then the tramp sprang over her body and into the house.

As he did so, a wild, terror-stricken cry escaped from Stella's lips. The crisis she had feared had come. In vain she tried to fly.

The tramp had seized her in his muscular arms. It seemed that her fate was sealed.

A sponge in his hand was held over her nostrils, and gradually, as she was stifled with the drug, her struggles grew weaker, until she lay weak and limp in his arms.

Edward Maxwell who had been sitting in a dazed state by the stove, now came forward.

The wild cry from Stella had seemed to have an effect upon him.

He was befogged, but a stray idea struggled through his muddled brain that Stella was suffering injury, and he was endowed with anger and determination. He glared at the seeming tramp in a wild, maniacal sort of way.

"Why do you do that?" he said. "Let go of my pretty white dove. Don't dare to hurt her. Oh, I can kill you! You shall see!"

A strange expression came into the tramp's face. He gazed at Edward a moment with a wild light flashing in his eyes.

"I have a mind to do it," he muttered. "I hate him heartily, and he would be out of my way forever."

No sooner had the words left his lips, than he deposited Stella's limp form upon the floor, and said warningly to Maxwell:

"Take care, boss! Don't come too near!"

As well might he have talked to the winds. The maniac knows no restraint, no fear, and Maxwell advanced upon him like a tiger.

"I see you!" he cried in his wrath. "There is fire all over you, but I don't care for you! You cannot have my pretty white dove! I can kill you!"

The next moment Maxwell had sprung upon the tramp. A terrible struggle followed.

Ordinarily the young overseer would have been more than a match for the tramp, but his sickness had weakened him and the sequel was brief.

The tramp struck him a terrible blow upon the head and he sank down unconscious. His assailant was about to bend over him, when a sound without the cottage caused him to seize Stella's form in his arms and make a rapid exit.

Down the hillside into the dark grove in the darkness he went, and came out at a lonely point on the river bank. A boat was drawn up there, and he sprang into it and pushed out into the current.

When, after an hour's rowing, he had left all habitations far behind, he arose in the boat and with a quick motion whisked away the beard. He stood revealed in the dim light as Ralph Kilburn.

His plot had succeeded well, and he gazed triumphantly down at the inanimate form of Stella.

"The game is mine!" he cried.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## MAXWELL REGAINS HIS REASON.

THE blow which Mrs. Lord had received had produced only a short spell of unconsciousness and Kilburn had barely disappeared with his prize when she recovered her senses and slowly and painfully regained her feet. Her head swam and it was some moments before she could reason or act.

Then a swift recollection of all flashed over her. Her first thought was of Stella and her fears took the wildest and most fantastic shapes.

She called out despairingly:

"Stella, my child, where are you? Are you safer?"

All was dark and quiet in the room. Only the firelight from the little hearth shed a glimmering ray across it.

And this revealed the prostrate form of Edward Maxwell. In a moment Mrs. Lord realized that he had been injured, perhaps killed, and a wild cry of horror pealed from her lips.

"Oh, heaven help me!" she cried. "He cannot be dead. It must not be. And they have taken her away."

She regretted now that she had not heeded Stella's warning. But there was no use in "crying over spilled milk," and, like the brave woman that she was, she proceeded to make the best of it.

It was some distance to the neighbors', but she flew there with all speed and brought assistance.

But before they arrived Edward Maxwell had recovered his senses. He was not fatally injured, but seemed in a strange, weak state of mind, and was hastily put to bed and word despatched to the doctor.

Men scoured the vicinity thoroughly for a trace of the rascally abductor, but he had made good his escape. Not a trace of him could be found.

Mrs. Lord was in a state of the wildest excitement. She was completely prostrated with grief over the fate of Stella.

"Oh, if I had only listened to her warning," she would moan, "all would have been averted."

But though the clouds seemed to have culminated in a dark mass over her life, Mrs. Lord, in the midst of all, was suddenly rewarded with a gratifying surprise.

When the doctor arrived he at once gave his attention to Edward, and his face was an enigma as he felt his pulse and gazed into his eyes.

Maxwell was very pale and weak, yet he looked up into the doctor's face and said, quite rationally:

"Doctor, where have I been? What has been the matter with me?"

Very quietly the doctor sat down and gazed steadily into the sick man's eyes.

"Just try your memory a little," he said.

"I-I can't exactly remember," said Edward, flashing a confused gaze at the doctor. "It was so long ago. I I think—"

"That's it," said the doctor. "Don't you remember the party?"

"Yes—yes," cried Maxwell eagerly. "That is it. I went home with Stella. No—I started—"

"And reached the bridge."

"The bridge—yes—yes," cried the excited Maxwell; "now it all comes to me. Oh, I remember all. I was struck on the head. Then I remember of being between the bridge partition. Then I fell into the water. Oh, it was a long swim, and—and—but I can't remember any more."

"No," said the doctor gravely, "you will never remember what has transpired since. But you will always remember the past. Mrs. Lord, by the grace of heaven, *this man's reason is restored to him at last.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

Down the river Kilburn rowed with his prize. It was now extremely dark, and he



was aware of the fact that his captive must soon overcome the effects of the drug, when she might cause him some trouble.

He drove the boat in shore at a favorable point. Then he proceeded to strip off his ragged garments. Beneath them he wore a suit of fine cloth, and when he re-entered the boat he was a much changed person.

He kept on now down the river, with long strokes. His destination was not far distant, and he did not betray anxiety.

After his release from jail, Kilburn had been shrewd enough to keep dark.

The next morning's paper had informed him of his narrow escape from Dan Hayes' clutches, and now that he was posted, he was resolved to keep beyond the reach of the law.

"When they catch me again," he had said, "it will be under most unfortunate circumstances."

A dark plot he had planned since his escape. His feelings toward his father were not of the kindest since he had been publicly disowned by his disgraced parent.

"It is a long road," he muttered grimly. "The governor didn't stick by me, and I am his own flesh and blood. But if I don't get square with him, then I am wrong in my guess. That is all."

Money was the principal need that Kilburn felt now. He did not fear immediate recapture, for he had great faith in his ability to keep out of the clutches of the officers. But this security could not last always. The danger was great and hourly increasing. He had now got Stella in his power once more. If he only had some money, he could get aboard a European steamer and take her abroad with him. Once there he might resist all efforts made toward the recovery of his prize, and he could bring her to his terms.

Among the list of Kilburn's acquaintances was a certain woman of various professions, who rejoiced in the somewhat pretentious name of Madame Black, medium and clairvoyant. This woman had an office in Lawrence at the time, and affected to do a good business in her line.

But, to certain people, she was known as a wily, unscrupulous woman. By Kilburn she had been selected as just the woman to carry out his scheme.

An interview with her had resulted in the forming of an infamous compact.

Madam Black pretended to own the secret of a preparation which would reduce the intellectual faculties to a pliable extent; that is, stupefy the brain for a period of time so that an unbounded influence might be gained over a person who was under the power of the drug.

It was proposed to abduct Stella once more and use this drug upon her. The young girl would be incapable of anything but implicit obedience and the celebrated medium and clairvoyant would at once take the young girl aboard the Cunarder in Boston, where Kilburn would rejoin them, after having obtained money from his father.

Partly, the scheme had been rewarded with success. Stella had been abducted and now Kilburn was hastening to a rendezvous appointed by himself and the woman Black.

It was not much further to the appointed place, where the old Lawrence road came down near the bank of the Merrimack river.

Into a little cove Kilburn drove the boat and then leaped out. He took Stella's form in his arms and mounted the bank of the river.

He had scarcely done this, when a form emerged from the bushes and stood before him. It was a woman with coarse features and stout frame.

"You've got her?" said the woman. "That's the way to do the business."

"Here she is," said Kilburn. "Is the coast all clear?"

"Yes."

"And you've got a carriage here?"

"Yes."

"Want any further help?"

"No," said Madam Black, "I'll take care of her now. But carry out the rest of your scheme with all haste. We haven't got any time to lose."

"You're right," said Kilburn, springing back into the boat. "Work it sharp, won't you?"

"Never fear," replied Madam Black, who lifted Stella's form in her strong arms and placed it in a buggy which stood near.

Then she clambered in and drove rapidly away into the night. When the sound of the wheels had died away, Kilburn pushed off.

"A good night's work," he muttered. "Now for the rest of it."

He pulled away up the river with all his strength. It was not more than two hours later when he arrived at the foot of Hunt's Falls and ran his boat ashore.

A short while later he had passed through the side streets of Belvidere and was in the darkness of the shrubbery in the grounds of his father's mansion.

A light shone from the library window. Kilburn mounted a balcony and gazed into the room. His father, the white-haired banker, sat at a table.

It was but a moment's work for Kilburn to push back the glass window which opened out upon the balcony, and then he was in the room. The banker, startled, looked up at this unceremonious entrance, and a tableau was formed.

"Ralph!" said the father in tones of astonishment, blended with sternness. "You here?"

"You need not be surprised, father," said Ralph coolly. "I have not come back like a schoolboy to say I'm sorry. I have got too much of the old Kilburn blood in me for that. No. I don't ask your forgiveness or your love after your unjust treatment of me."

"Unjust?" ejaculated the banker. "What could I do when my own son brings my name in disgrace?"

"Oh, I don't find any fault," said Ralph recklessly, "and we won't argue. I come here to make a proposition to you, and if you are wise you will accept."

"Well?" said the banker coldly.

"I am your son," said Ralph. "You have disowned me, and all that, but I am your flesh and blood. You are proud of your family name. I am entitled to an heirship as your nearest living relative. But I will not persecute you for her. I know there is no chance for me in America, or of my ever retrieving my name. No, I must go abroad in order to live a new and better life. I have decided upon that and have come to say a final farewell."

"Abroad?" said the banker, now deeply affected. "Oh, Ralph, that all this should ever have been. I have loved you but there is, as you say, a gulf between us. Yes, perhaps you are right. You are wanted now by the law."

"Yes."

"Well, go now. Go while you can, and take your father's last blessing. Seek your fortune in some far land, and I will pray for your welfare."

Ralph smiled coldly, and still maintaining his reserve, said:

"But I have one request to ask of you before I go."

"What is it?" queried the banker.

"I am in reduced circumstances. I must have money."

"Money?" said Mr. Kilburn; "that is your want? Well, I will give you money. What will you require?"

"Five thousand dollars."

The banker gazed keenly at his son.

"When you get abroad, will you use that money judiciously, Ralph?" he queried.

"I pledge myself."

"Very well," said the banker, producing a roll of bills. "Here is one thousand now. I will send you the rest by sight draft to Liverpool. Draw upon me there. Now good bye."

Ralph Kilburn took the money from his

father's hand. One moment they gazed at each other. In that moment the only chord of sentiment that was ever struck in the erring son's breast was made to vibrate.

But only for a moment. Then Ralph Kilburn was in the open air.

"One thousand!" he said in his selfish way. "That will take me abroad. The game is well worked and cannot fail. Four thousand more in Liverpool, and if I draw again I know it will be honored. Hurrah! This is the greatest victory of my life, and if Madam Black fails me not my ends will meet and beautiful Stella Lord is mine forever."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE POLICE GAZETTE EXCHANGE.

DAN HAYES did not waste time after starting upon Flanagan's track. He followed him up Merrimack street for some ways and then into a narrow alley which passes through to Middle street.

The detective remembered the bootblack's reminder about the place on Market street presided over by Goldberry, and which bore the suspicion of a gambling house. He believed that Flanagan would surely make for this place.

But in this he was doomed to disappointment. The cracksman did not proceed in that direction at all, but turned into the Shattuck street entrance of the Boston and Lowell railroad station.

Dan followed him closely. There was a motive uppermost in his mind to arrest the villain upon the spot, but second thoughts influenced him to change his mind.

His inborn sense of curiosity as to the cracksman's plans led him to watch Flanagan and be content with simply shadowing him. He believed that a development of interest would follow such a move.

So he did not attempt to molest the other. He saw him step up to the ticket window and buy passage to Boston.

Dan waited until Flanagan had left the window, then he also purchased a ticket to the same destination.

The train was waiting without, and as Flanagan boarded it, the detective followed him. There were other detectives quite near when Flanagan stepped aboard the train, who would have given much to have acquired the honor of his arrest. But they did not recognize him. Only a sharp observer could have done this, for Flanagan's disguise was almost perfect.

Dan was also well disguised, yet these same detectives knew him. It was a matter of no little amusement and satisfaction to Dan, that they did not also recognize Flanagan.

He passed on into the car, and took a seat directly behind Flanagan. The train was an express, and stopped but once in the twenty-five mile run to Boston. Arrived in the big city, Flanagan crossed over Causeway street to Portland, and Dan, meanwhile, keeping close behind him.

In Portland street there is a celebrated sporting house known as Jim Keenan's. The proprietor was one of the best known sporting men in the country.

Over the door of the saloon was the *fac simile* of a trotting horse attached to a sulky, and the words, "Police Gazette Exchange." Here was the headquarters for almost the entire sporting fraternity of Boston, and even the East.

Straight toward this place Flanagan directed his footsteps. Dan guessed that it was his objective point long before he got there.

Turning into the Police Gazette Exchange, Flanagan stood up to the bar and called for liquor. Dan, who had followed him close, sat down at a table near and averted his face in order to escape recognition.

It was long after dark, and near the hour when the Exchange opened its nightly list of sports. These consisted of boxing matches, songs and dances, and musical features. A



vast crowd was always to be found in Keenan's every night.

Flanagan appeared very familiar with the place and seated himself finally at a table near Dan. He sipped a glass of beer, and seemed buried in thought, when, all at once, a man flashily dressed and bearing the stamp of a gambler, came up and spoke to him.

"John Flanagan, how are ye?" he said, recognizing the cracksman in spite of his disguise. "I am mighty glad to see ye. What's ther good word?"

"Tim Owen!" ejaculated Flanagan. "I am glad to see ye, Tim, but don't speak my name so loud around here. Somebody might get onto me, d'ye see?"

"Eh?" said Owen. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, cracking a bank or two," said Flanagan. "At any rate, it won't be healthy for me to let the police get onto my track. But how did ye know me?"

"How could I help knowing ye?" said Owen. "Do you suppose I ever forget a friend?"

"What are ye doing?"

"Going the rounds. Pull in a kid once in a while. Had a genuine greeny last night at poker, and won forty dollars off him."

"You're a slick one," said Flanagan approvingly. "I'll risk but you can get a living anywhere."

"Business is dull," said the gambler. "The laws are so strict that a man can't get elbow room in any legitimate trade."

"Better go into my business, then," said Flanagan with a laugh.

But he had scarcely spoken when a man came down the saloon and slapped him familiarly upon the shoulder. Dan started as he noted this man. It was Charley Crook, the Lawrence burglar.

"Ah, Bad Man Flanagan," said Crook with a laugh, "how are yer?"

"The devil!" ejaculated Flanagan.

"What's that for?" asked Crook in amazement.

"Do you know me, too?"

"Do I know yer?" Crook gazed questioningly at Flanagan as though in doubt as to his sanity. "Don't I know yer? Well, I ought to."

"Yes," said Flanagan in dismay, "but if my disguise is as easy got onto as this, I don't see what protection it is."

"Shake it," said Crook; "why not? But how's biz, John?"

"Pret y good," said Flanagan; "sit down."

Crook complied with this request and drinks were ordered. Dan all this while remained an interested and unobserved listener.

"We lost our little job on the Lawrence bank, didn't we, John?"

"I reckon we did," said John.

"And all on account of Dan Hayes. Cuss him, he's a bad one. But what's become of him? Hope he won't come across me ever. I'd put him on the shelf for the benefit of society."

A laugh followed this, which Dan, with his keen sense of humor, relished.

"Got any new job, John?" said Crook, who took the lead in the conversation.

"Nothing special. Got a little racket in New Haven," said Flanagan.

"How did you get out of your Salem scrape, Mr. Moore?"

"Moore is a good name," said Owen.

"Yes," said John. "No doubt the Salem police would like to know Moore of it, but I'm afraid they won't this year. Not for Sarah. Oh, no!"

A laugh followed this and even Dan was obliged to smile. Talk of this sort followed for some time and then Crook said:

"But, look here, boys. We're missing all the sport. The 'little terror' Denny, the slugger, is going to spar another light-weight named Jimmy Kerrigan, tonight. Let's go in and see 'em."

"I'm with ye," said Flanagan.

All three arose now, and passed into the hall beyond, where the so-called athletic sports were held.

It was a wide, roomy hall, and was packed with sporting men. The walls were ornamented with pictures of race horses and boxers, all in bold relief.

A stage confined with ropes was at the lower end of the hall. In one corner of the "ring" thus formed, stood a man with towels and a wet sponge. In the other corner was the timer with his watch.

Soon after they entered, this man stepped forward, and said:

"Gentlemen, I shall now have the pleasure of announcing to you an exciting contest between Jimmy Kerrigan, and Denny the slugger, light-weight boxers."

A cheer went up from the crowd, and then two slender-built youths leaped into the ring.

Each was stripped to the waist in the most approved style of the ring, and after shaking hands took their positions, with fists elevated, and dodging and ducking like a pair of enraged monkeys, until finally they came to blows.

With the first knock-down, which was won by the lad who bore the euphonious name of the "slugger," a cheer went up from the crowd. Money was freely bet upon the result.

But the other lad, Kerrigan, was none the worse for his knock-down and came up smiling when the next round was called. Finally he turned about and proceeded to worst the slugger in most approved fashion, and a few moments later the latter had retired from the ring, to use the common expression, "knocked out."

Some time elapsed after this in a general discussion of the issue of the affair, when the manager again came to the ropes and announced that the next bout would be an exhibition accorded any gentleman in the audience who aspired to fight honors and would like to meet an unknown opponent.

In response one of the crowd, a thick-set Irishman who gave his name as O'Brien, mounted the stage. He was greeted with cheers, and as he pulled off his coat, showed a deep, brawny chest, and great muscles.

"Mr. O'Brien will gladly meet any gentleman in the audience in a friendly bout," said the manager.

A buzz of interest was at once created, and O'Brien became the cynosure of all eyes. But nobody seemed disposed to accept his challenge.

Finally Crook turned to Flanagan and said: "John, go up and pound that duffer. You can do it."

"Yes," urged Owen, "give him a good try."

"He's a stout man," said Flanagan doubtfully.

"Never mind," said Crook. "You can do him up. Go ahead."

Thus urged, and now that he had become a centre of observation, Flanagan could not but comply.

He mounted the platform and proceeded to pull off his coat. And this revealed him as possessed of a physique scarcely less inferior to that of O'Brien.

Great interest was now manifested, as it was expected that after the two men got started they would lose their tempers and fall to fierce fighting, which was an issue that would just suit the morbid crowd.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FLANAGAN CONFRONTS THE DETECTIVE.

DAN himself was not the least interested of the crowd of spectators. But he was not particularly a lover of such sport, and only witnessed it with the end in view that his man would be apt to get a good pounding. He had little idea that Flanagan could worst such an opponent as O'Brien, but after all he had not much knowledge of the cracksman's powers.

Flanagan bore up well through the first round, and when the manager called time he was not much the worse for wear, while O'Brien had swollen lips, the effect of a well directed blow.

But the next round, O'Brien got in his work in good shape, and Flanagan being roughly handled, was knocked over the ropes by virtue of superior weight, nothing else. However, he was but slightly injured.

The crowd cheered him to the echo, and when they came up for the third round the excitement was intense. But Flanagan had got his hand in by this time and easily pounded his man, the result being that he was given the fight.

Dropping his gloves, he made a bow to the applauding crowd and, a few moments later, had rejoined his friends, Crook and Owen, as serene as could well be imagined.

A man came up to him from the crowd and grasped his hand, saying:

"You did well, friend. What's your name, and where are you from?"

"My name is Moore," said Flanagan guardedly, "and I am from the country."

"Not much of a countryman, though," said the other with a laugh. "That upper cut of yours might be made into an ugly blow with a little training. I am somewhat of a pugilist, myself. Drop in some morning, and we will try a bout for fun."

And with this the stranger walked away. When he had gone Flanagan turned to Crook, saying:

"Who was that chap? Do you know him?"

"Know him?" queried Crook. "Well, you bet I know him. He is one of the coming pugilists and I've backed him with my humble boodle to cover the championship of the world. That's John L. Sullivan."

It was indeed the champion pugilist, who had not then attained the world-wide notoriety and fame that he has since held. Flanagan has since recalled this affair to mind many times.

The trio of villains now repaired to a table and played a short game of poker. Then Owen took his leave, and, left alone with Flanagan, Crook reached forward and said mysteriously:

"Look here, John, what's this New Haven game? I'm out of a job. Ain't I in with ye?"

Flanagan gazed steadily at Crook a moment and then said:

"Do you want to go in?"

"Yes."

"Will you stick fast?"

"Won't I?—try me."

"There's danger in it."

"I do't care for that."

"And we may get bagged."

"What's the job?"

"There's a banker in New Haven by the name of Price. I believe his full name is Hiram Price. He has got a safe in his office which generally holds a good boodle."

The two men gazed at each other steadily.

It is needless to say that a mutual understanding was at once created.

"That sounds like old times," said Crook.

"Ah, there ain't many men of your stamp nowadays, John. Men who will dare and do. Am I with ye? Well, give us yer flipper."

They crossed palms; the contract was made. Flanagan had faith in Crook and vice versa. The detective, sitting unperceived near by, overheard all.

He smiled quietly as he thought of the pleasant surprise party he would have ready for the enterprising cracksmen.

"I'll make it dizzy for them," he muttered; "or my name is not Dan Hayes."

After awhile they conversed in whispers. Dan knew that they were laying the plans of the contemplated robbery and would have given much to have overheard them.

But this was out of the question, so he was compelled to be satisfied with what he had learned already. After a spell Flanagan arose and sauntered toward the door.



He gazed out of the window, up and down the street, and then turned and beckoned to Crook. The latter joined him and together they passed out upon the street. Now the detective was all alive.

"So that's the little game," he muttered. "You will rob the Hon. Hiram Price's safe? Not this time, my dear fellows. I have got the line on you and will make it musical for you yet."

Dan followed the cracksmen out upon the street. Leaving Portland street they proceeded up to Bowdoin Square. Here Dan saw that they were in the act of separating.

"The Providence depot tomorrow at nine," he heard Flanagan say as Crook moved away.

Flanagan stood for a moment gazing after his confederate. Then he turned in the direction of Tremont street. Dan followed him now quite closely, for the crowd was thick here, and he feared losing him.

Flanagan went on up Tremont street and then turned into a narrow alley that led toward Washington street. Dan followed him into the place, when all at once the cracksmen disappeared.

This was a surprise to the detective. If the earth had opened and swallowed his man up, he could not have made a more effectual disappearance.

Dan gazed about him. High-walled buildings rose upon either side, and there was scarcely a door or window to break the sameness. There could be but one inference, and this was, naturally, that Flanagan had turned into some private way or secret entrance.

To find that, Dan now believed was his province. And he essayed an immediate search.

He proceeded down the alley for some ways, and all at once came to a niche in the wall. The detective was about to examine it when he received a startling surprise.

A man stepped out of it and stood before him. Dan's astonishment was too forcible for expression when he recognized this man. It was Flanagan. Again they were face to face.

Dan Hayes and Flanagan the cracksmen stood and gazed at each other for some moments in silence. Then the cracksmen spoke:

"Who are you, and what do you mean by following me?"

Dan gave a little start. Was it possible that he was not recognized?

"How do you know I am following you?" he said obtusely.

"How do I know it?" repeated Flanagan. "Why shouldn't I know it? More than that, I think I know you in spite of your disguise. You are Dan Hayes the detective."

Dan could not speak for a moment. The two enemies, for such they were, gazed at each other.

"Yes, I am Dan Hayes," finally Dan replied. "You are John Flanagan."

"I am," said Flanagan, with no attempt at concealment.

"Well, I am glad to meet you, Mr. Flanagan. I have looked for you far and wide."

"What do you want of me?"

"Why ask that question?"

"Will you answer it?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"I want you upon a score of charges of breaking and entering, and of robbery."

"Is there any specially bad deed that you want me for?" said Flanagan. "I am not a murderer?"

"No—not to my knowledge."

"No man can say that I ever insulted a woman?"

"It may be so."

"Still I suppose it is your duty as an officer to take me in, if you can. But I am sorry, Mr. Hayes, I must positively decline to go with you."

"Indeed," said Dan ironically; "upon the other hand, I shall be sorry to be compelled to use force."

"Do you talk of force to me?"

"Why should I not? You refuse to go with me willingly."

Flanagan gazed steadily at the detective, then said:

"It is foolish for you to attempt to best me, Dan Hayes. I am a desperate man, and much stronger than you. I would not like to do you harm, but I warn you to let me alone. I don't mean to be taken alive."

With this, Flanagan essayed to move away. But Dan, with lightning quickness, placed his hand upon his arm. It was the signal for a desperate struggle.

Dan was very supple and strong. But he had grappled this time with a veritable Samson. The struggle that followed baffles description.

In the midst of it a couple of policemen came down the alley. These would have rendered Dan assistance, but that Flanagan burst his hold and ran.

Dan was close upon his heels, but the cracksmen proved the better runner, and ere the end of the alley was reached, had gained a good lead.

Turning out of the alley into Washington street, Flanagan mingled with the crowd and disappeared.

No amount of search was rewarded with a clew. Once more, with that inherent trait for making his escape at the last moment, Flanagan had eluded justice.

Dan was somewhat chagrined. But his day of triumph was coming, as we shall see. He was now in a quandary. What should he do? This was the query, and it agitated his mind not a little. There was one certain clew in his grasp, and this was the projected robbery in New Haven.

But would Flanagan give it over now for fear that Dan had got wind of it? The detective fancied not, as Flanagan had no reason for entertaining such a fear. Moreover, Crook was concerned in it, which was an additional reason why Flanagan should keep his contract.

Dan decided to let matters rest until morning. Accordingly, satisfied with the night's work, he went to a hotel, and after securing a good room, retired for the night. He slept soundly until daybreak, then was astir at an early hour.

A premonition told him that the biggest day's work of his career was before him. He ardently embraced the prospect and did not in the slightest particular shrink from the task. He proceeded to the Providence depot at the appointed hour.

To his surprise, Flanagan was there with Crook, and together they boarded the New Haven train.

Dan noted this with a thrill, and then, also buying a ticket for New Haven, entered another car.

"I will be there also," he muttered.

## CHAPTER XX.

### MAXWELL CONFRONTS MADAM BLACK.

THE recovery of Edward Maxwell from his mental malady was like a miracle to those who witnessed it. Only the sage doctor knew that it was nothing more than a fortunate accordance of the laws of nature.

Edward began gaining strength and reason rapidly now, and in a day or two was able to be out. But the doctor admonished him against excitement.

Maxwell, however, was almost crazed over the abduction of Stella Lord. The incidents, as near as his memory could supply them, were of a sort to harrow up his mind and work upon his nerves until he could not contain himself.

"I must go to her rescue," he said at length, despairingly. "Oh, there is a bitter reckoning between Ralph Kilburn and me. I must go—poor little Stella calls me. She must be saved."

In this state of mind it was impossible to restrain him, and he at once set about the

work of tracking Stella and her abductors. Detectives had learned that she had been taken to Lawrence.

Others had seen Kilburn the same night in another part of the city. All reports were conflicting, and it was difficult to tell just how the matter stood.

But Maxwell kept quietly at work. His mental faculties were wholly restored to him, and he taxed them well in the pursuit of his end. He worked hard, and in the end met with a fair degree of success.

He tracked Stella to Lawrence quite easily, as the detectives had done. But from there a trace was gone.

He got track of Madam Black in Lawrence, and this proved the clew which led to the ultimate success of his search.

He learned the particulars of Madame Black's profession in Lawrence. He made careful inquiry into her standing among good people in that city, and found that it was not of the best. He learned that she had gone to Boston with a young lady in her charge who seemed to be suffering from some illness.

This young lady answered exactly to the description of Stella. Maxwell was not slow in grasping the situation, and accepting the supposition that it was she, at once started for Boston.

Upon every hand fresh clues now started up to aid him. It chanced that in the very car in which he journeyed to Boston he observed a neat white handkerchief hanging to a bracket at the end of the car. A traveller had lost it. The conductor had picked it up and at once accepted the inference that it belonged to one of the number of school girls who travelled on the road. But the handkerchief looked familiar to Maxwell. He took it and noted an initial in the corner. It was the letter L.

While upon the border in India ink was the name Stella Lord.

A cry of joy broke from Maxwell's lips, and he then knew conclusively that he was upon the right track. He accosted the conductor, who was just passing through the car.

"Have you, within a week, my friend," he queried, "seen a young girl in company with a woman of middle age, and wearing a black veil, in this car?"

Maxwell had obtained an accurate description of Madame Black. The conductor was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"I remember two such people. The girl was sick, I believe. She was very pale."

"That is it," said Maxwell eagerly. "Did they have any baggage?"

"I believe not."

"Maxwell had thought of tracking them by their baggage checks. He was disappointed at the conductor's reply.

"You do not know where they went after leaving the train?"

"To be sure I do not," replied the conductor.

Maxwell was now disposed to believe that he had reached the most difficult stage in the search. It had been easy to track them to Boston. But in a large city like this there were many places where Stella might be secreted and not discovered in a year.

Knowing this, Maxwell was not disposed to waste time uselessly. He must adopt that method of procedure which was at once the most direct and coupled with the least likelihood of a failure.

Time was valuable. There was no doubt but that Kilburn meant to take his prize abroad with him. This accomplished, in all probability Stella would be lost to her true lover forever.

The thought almost maddened Maxwell. He did not forbear to mentally vow vengeance upon Kilburn if he put his villainous scheme into operation.

He searched Boston assiduously. He could not find any trace of them. But at length chance threw in his way a remarkable clew. He was passing down Washington street when a woman passed him in a crowd.



She was dressed in black and was veiled. Maxwell could not see her face, but he remembered that this was the usual *personnel* of Madam Black, and an inspiration seized him.

There were scores of such women to be seen upon the same street. A black veil is not uncommon, but something more than an ordinary motive caused Maxwell to follow her.

He did this, and before they had gone a block, and when in front of the old South church, he summoned courage, and going up to her, touched her upon the arm.

"Your pardon," he said politely, "but is not this Madam Black, of Lawrence?"

The woman gave a violent start and flashed a glance of suspicion at the speaker through the veil. Maxwell's face wore a pleasant expression, and as she did not know him she was completely disarmed.

"Who are you?" she said. "What do you want of Madam Black?"

"I want a good clairvoyant," said Maxwell by way of subterfuge, "and I understand that she is excellent."

The ruse completely deceived the woman. She saw in Maxwell only a good customer, and said readily:

"I am happy to place myself at your disposal. I have had much experience as a clairvoyant. What can I do for you?"

"Then you are Madame Black?" said Maxwell persistently.

"Yes."

"That is enough," said our hero. "I am Edward Maxwell, and I demand, Madam Black, that you tell me truthfully what you have done with Stella Lord. If you do not tell me I will have you arrested at once."

Madam Black started as if shot. Had a thunderbolt fallen on her feet she could not have received a greater shock. She could not speak but trembled violently, while her face was very pale.

"Are you going to tell me the truth, Madam Black?" said Maxwell again.

"I—I do not know what you are talking about," said the clairvoyant feebly. "I cannot tell you nothing. I do not know such a person as Stella Lord."

"Don't lie," said Maxwell sternly. "I have proof that you had her in your power in Lawrence, and I brought her to Boston all the while under the influence of a stupefying drug, which rendered her incapable of offering resistance. I know all, Madam Black, and I will give you but one minute in which to answer me."

The declaration was forcible and could not help but have weight with the woman. She hesitated.

"If I tell you," she said, "you will have me arrested then?"

"No," said Maxwell earnestly. "Tell me the truth and I will suffer you to go free."

"Well," said Madam Black slowly, "if you will swear to do that I will tell you where she is."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A DARING SCHEME.

DAN HAYES we left boarding the New Haven train in pursuit of his birds, Crook and Flanagan. The detective felt intuitively that he had a long series of thrilling developments before him.

He took a seat in the car in the rear of the one in which were the two burglars. The train dashed out of the depot and sped away through the country like a meteor.

It was but an hour's run to Providence, and after leaving that city the detective knew that it would be about noon when New Haven was reached. It was a fast express, and but little time was wasted in the trip.

Dan kept his seat and killed time by making notes of his case until finally the train reached New Haven. Then he arose and passed from the car. The time for action had come.

He hung back until he saw his men alight, then he followed them through the depot into the street.

Here they stood in the cover of an angle in the building and conversed for some time in low tones. Dan desired much to know what they were saying, so managed to edge up along the wall until he had reached a spot where he could overhear them.

Standing idly thus against the side of the depot, the passing crowd did not notice him and never guessed his motive. Meanwhile every word spoken by the plotters reached Dan's ears.

"This man's office, ye say, is on M— street, eh?" queried Crook.

"Yes," replied Flanagan. "You'll see the name over the door, Hiram Price. He's a banker and speculator, and there's always money in his safe. It's a big one and sets in a vault. A good many people use it for safe deposit, d'ye see?"

"Do they?" said Crook, rubbing his hands briskly. "Well, that's just the racket I like. I am smitten with these safe deposit vaults. About how much money d'ye s'pose there is in there?"

"That is hard to estimate," said Flanagan. "But there's a big lot of it, never fear. Now don't fail me!"

"Tonight at ten?"

"Yes—at the corner of M— street, just beyond the office."

"I'll be there," said Crook. "But I want to ask ye another question."

"Well?"

"How are ye goin' to get into the place?"

"You'll see when the time comes."

"Yes, but yer don't object to giving me a point or two now?"

"Well," said Flanagan, "we can't get in on the front. There's plate glass windows there and bars back of 'em. That won't do."

"I see."

"But there's a coal chute in the rear of the building. That's the place. It goes into the cellar. Betwixt the cellar and the vault there's a brick wall two feet thick and an iron fire guard, consisting of a sheet of iron an inch thick."

"Whew!" ejaculated Crook. "How in thunder do you expect to get into the vault? We couldn't help getting through the brick, but we couldn't saw a hole through that inch of iron sheeting in a week."

"Don't want to."

"Eh?"

"Of course not. There's another way."

"Oh, there is?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"You see," said Flanagan, lowering his voice, "I don't intend to go through. They didn't expect when they built that vault that anybody would attempt to get through that wall of iron. It looks safe. But my plan is to go under. Do yer see?"

"Go under?" ejaculated Crook.

"Yes."

"Well, I don't exactly see."

"Easy enough. The brick wall is laid on a foundation of stone. I shan't touch the stone. The floor of the vault is of brick. I can go through the brick wall about three feet below the cellar bottom and up through the brick floor. Now do ye see?"

"Well, yes, now I do," said Crook, so impressed with the magnitude of the scheme that he could scarcely get his breath, "but you'll need some tools, John."

"Of course I'll want some tools," said Flanagan. "And I've got 'em, too. A pick, a shovel and a lantern. We want a kit—you can carry off that—some jimmies and a can of powder. We may have to blow open the safe, if we can't drill it?"

"All right," said Crook, moving away. "I'll be on hand."

With this they separated. Dan did not attempt to follow either man further. He

knew this would hardly be prudent. He did not attempt to arrest them, either, for his interest in the progress of their daring scheme was so great that he anticipated greater satisfaction in capturing them in the act.

In the meanwhile he could busy himself in looking over the ground. He at once took measures to learn where Hiram Price's banking rooms were, and then visited M— street, and, unnoticed by anybody, made an examination of the building.

In its rear was the alley which led by the coal chute which the cracksmen had mentioned.

The chute was covered with an iron frame and fastened with a padlocked bolt. This would not be a difficult thing to force, as the detective could easily see.

As time passed and the evening drew near, Dan was not oblivious of a general feeling of excitement. But there was an adventurous pleasure in all which took possession of him and held him enthralled. He could not resist it.

There were a few preparations which he felt was necessary for him to make. He was not armed having left his revolvers in Lowell. He proceeded to a store near by and purchased a brace of Colts. He had manacles and a pocket lantern which was all that he now required.

He did not communicate with the New Haven police, for various reasons. One was the fear that in some manner the report might get abroad and give warning to the thieves. Another was that he felt quite sure of being able to take care of both of them alone.

So he decided to make his game known to none, but paddle his own canoe. There were too many odds to contend with to take chances.

At length darkness shut down over the city and the hour of ten came on rapidly. It was a little past the hour when Dan, keeping in the shadow, made his way to a point near M— street.

There were a few pedestrians upon the street. But gradually these disappeared, and the long lamp-lighted thoroughfares became deserted.

The time for work was near. Dan experienced a thrill as he noted that a clock upon a lighted tower near showed the hour of eleven.

One hour later than the hour of appointment, and yet the safe-breakers had not put in an appearance. And yet that they were near the detective felt assured.

All at once after an anxious period of suspense Dan saw two dark forms slink into the alley. The detective was at the moment in a darkened doorway just below.

A policeman lounged into view. He passed the alley, and also quite near to Dan, but suspected nothing.

After a while, when he was satisfied that the coast was clear, he left his place and stole into the alley. He crept along close to the building until he reached a heap of dry goods boxes. Behind these he slipped and upon the other side of them he heard whisperings.

"We are sure to work it, John," said Crook in a whisper. Dan knew at once who it was.

"Yes," was the reply in the same tone.

"Luck is evidently on our side. It will be a good haul."

"I hope so."

"Did you get the kit?"

"Yes, I've got everything."

"And the dry, noiseless powder?"

"Yes."

"That's good. What time is it now?"

Dan heard a clicking sound like the opening and shutting of a watch.

"It is a quarter of twelve."

Dan was surprised. How quickly the time had passed! He was now upon the *qui vive*.

"Pretty near time," said Flanagan.

"Yes," replied Crook. "Why not go to work?"



"No, wait till after the hour; I'm superstitious. The luck's all after twelve."

"All right."

The moments sped by. The two cracksmen did not speak again. Dan heard the bells of the city ring out the hour of midnight. Three, four, five minutes elapsed, and then a couple of dark, silent forms moved across the alley.

The iron cap to the coal chute was attacked silently and swiftly. Just how it was done, Dan could not see, but all at once it was moved away from its place. He had heard the jingling of keys and guessed that the padlock had been unlocked with a skeleton, or duplicate.

After the cap had been removed the two men dropped like shadows into the chute. This was the last that Dan saw of them for the moment.

Then he crossed the alley himself and listened at the mouth of the chute. He could hear a faint sound like the working of pick and shovel.

An hour passed in this way, and then the sounds ceased.

Dan came to the conclusion that the brick wall had been passed, and decided to make a move.

He examined his revolvers and made sure that they were all right; then he dropped quietly into the chute. He worked his way down silently and found himself finally in the cellar. It was dark where he stood, but in another part of the cellar—for it was divided into two parts—he saw the glimmer of a lantern.

He could also hear the dull, rasping sound made by a chisel working on brick, and concluded that the job was not yet finished. But he had not stood in his present position many moments when he was startled by hearing Flanagan's voice.

"Did you hear that, Charley? It was a noise in the front part of the cellar."

"No," said Crook in a whisper.

"Well, I heard it. Somebody is out there. Take the light and go and see."

Dan heard Crook mumbling something like an exclamation under his breath, and then he heard his footsteps coming across the cellar while the light was approaching.

Dan was thrilled at the denouement, for he was not yet ready to declare himself and hardly knew what to do. He waited with bated breath.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### DEATH OF RALPH KILBURN.

EDWARD MAXWELL awaited with eagerness what Madam Black had to say. She had said that she would tell him the whereabouts of Stella Lord. But now the wily medium hesitated again and said:

"If I told you that, sir, he would kill me."

"Who?" queried Maxwell.

"Kilburn. He is a devil."

"That is nothing to me."

"He need know nothing of it, though," she said plausibly. "You will not tell him who told you?"

"Of course I will not," said Maxwell. "But then you need hardly fear Kilburn, for he will shortly be where he cannot harm you. There are counts enough against him to send him to prison for life."

"In that case," said Madam Black, with a smile, "I need not fear him. You have offered all that is fair; I will tell you all."

"That is what I want," said Maxwell impatiently.

"Stella was abducted by Kilburn, and after being carried down the river in a boat, was given into my care. I took her to Lawrence and gave her a drug which, while it deprived her of will power, nevertheless suffered her to go about mechanically, and seemingly in an imbecile state."

"So I thought," said Maxwell. "I learned nearly as much as that while in Lawrence."

"Then I brought her to Boston," said

Madam Black. "I took her to the east side and kept her there until Kilburn got ready to go abroad. He was going the very next night, but suddenly changed his mind."

"He has not gone yet?" gasped Maxwell.

"No," said Madam Black, "but he is going tomorrow. He is to be married to the girl today. I was on my way to get a minister when you stopped me."

"Great Heavens!" cried Maxwell with a deadly pallor. "But Stella would resist that."

"Oh, no," said the woman with a wicked smile. "She is so thoroughly under the influence of the drug that you can make her say anything you please."

"What a damnable plot!" cried Edward Maxwell aghast. "But God has given me strength and the chance to baffle it. Oh, Ralph Kilburn, there will be a bitter reckoning when we are face to face!"

The thought of Stella's helplessness almost maddened Maxwell. He could hardly contain himself, and grasped Madam Black's arm, saying, excitedly:

"Come, you must tell me at once where she is. Delay not."

"Kilburn is at the Clafin Hotel," said Madam Black. "He has the girl there. But I cannot go there with you. Promise me you will not betray me to him."

"No," cried Maxwell excitedly, "I will not betray you, never fear. But do not detain me further. Every moment is precious. Stella, my love, I will save you!"

In a half insane state he dashed down Washington street and struck down into Devonshire from Franklin street. He knew where the Clafin Hotel was, and rapidly hastened thither.

But ere he reached there his fever had subsided and he was enabled to think and act coolly. He determined to make sure of Kilburn's capture as well as Stella's rescue.

He plunged on and finally reached his destination. Dashing into the office he demanded to be shown to the room occupied by Kilburn who was registered under an assumed name. He was only enabled after making a close description to learn that they were indeed there.

"I think I know," said the clerk. "There are two women and they have a parlor suite. Take the gentleman up at once."

Scarcely able to restrain himself Maxwell sprang into the elevator and a moment later was threading corridors in an upper story to a room which was really the prison chamber of Stella.

The boy who accompanied him rapped at a door numbered 154. Presently an answer came to the knock in a voice which Maxwell knew was Kilburn's.

"Who is it?"

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said the bell boy.

"Well, I can't see anybody today," said Kilburn gruffly. "Tell him to come some other time."

"Yes, you will see him today," cried Maxwell loudly. "We shall see."

And with this he threw himself against the door. The lock yielded and the next moment he sprang into the room. The scene which followed is a difficult one to depict.

Face to face they were at last. The wrong doer and the wronged. It was a tableau worthy of an artist's brush. Maxwell gazed sternly, accusingly, at his enemy. The room was a well furnished parlor, and at a table Kilburn was writing, while, in a chair, before a grate fire was a slender female figure.

"At last, Ralph Kilburn," cried Maxwell accusingly. "The tables have turned and this time I hold the card that wins."

"Edward Maxwell!" cried Kilburn springing to his feet. "You here?"

The female figure in the chair had arisen at this and turned toward Edward. It was Stella Lord, but how changed!

Her beautiful face was haggard and pinched,

and she gazed listlessly about her. But in spite of the drug, Maxwell's words had affected her, and she now came naturally toward him and into his arms.

"My own Stella!" he cried, folding her to his breast. "This time you shall never leave these arms. You are mine and I will only give you up with my life."

Kilburn was furious. He saw at once that fate had overthrown his game. His face was purple with the burst of rage.

He arose swiftly and gazed at Maxwell with a demoniac gleam in his eyes. He spoke sharply and savagely.

"By what right, Edward Maxwell," he said, "do you come here to interfere with me? Curse you! you have been the bane of my life."

"I came here, Ralph Kilburn," said Maxwell proudly, "by the right of a man and a lover. This young girl whom you have vainly sought to win in your vile way has given her heart to me and I will soon be my wife."

"Your wife," sneered Kilburn. And then with a mocking laugh:

"Well, take her. I wish you joy! She has been mine, ha, ha. I turn her over to you."

Something like comprehension now struggled through Stella's befogged brain. She turned upon her traducer like a tigress.

"Do not dare to vilify my character, Ralph Kilburn," she said. "You have played the villain long enough. Turn your course now."

Edward Maxwell now slipped from Stella's embrace and approached Kilburn.

"Come," he said tersely. "I want you. I am going to deliver you to an officer."

"Deliver me to an officer?" bawled Kilburn, maddened beyond restraint. "Never! Keep off, I say! I will never be taken alive. Back, or I will kill you."

A revolver flashed in his hand. Maxwell hesitated. He was brave, but not foolhardy.

"That is right," said Kilburn, with a weird laugh; "shows your common sense. I always thought you a shrewd fellow."

His demeanor now changed. He advanced to the table and seated himself at it, placing the revolver before him. There was a strange light in his eyes as he gazed straight at Maxwell, and said with deliberation:

"You and I don't love each other, do we, Ed Maxwell?"

"I am afraid not," admitted Maxwell.

"That's right," said Kilburn with a reckless laugh. "But you can't help admitting that I played a good hand. You've won it. It's your luck. Well, go in and scoop this little jack-pot. It's all yours, and I'm out in the cold. But I loved that girl, Ed Maxwell. I'd made her a good husband. But that's all over. The governor is down on me, there's a warrant out for my arrest. The whole world is against me. What is the use of living? Better out of the world than out of fashion, and I'm afraid I'm decidedly out of joint. Well, here goes for a visit to his satanic majesty."

All this had been delivered in a fevered, rambling way, yet nobody suspected his purpose until it was executed.

Then the revolver muzzle was swiftly pressed to his temple, there was a report, and Ralph Kilburn lay back in his chair. When Maxwell, horrified, reached his side, he was a corpse.

With the reader's kind permission, let us change the scene without pausing to dwell upon the horrible details of Ralph Kilburn's last crime.

The story of the affair was published far and wide, and interest ran high in the fate of sweet little Stella Lord, the mill girl. As for Ralph Kilburn, the shock of his self-murder was great, but few were inclined to sympathy, save for his heart-broken father, who now was more a victim of grief than ever.

Stella, reunited to her mother and her faithful lover, Edward Maxwell, was very



happy and wept tears of joy when once more restored to her home by the river-side.

Madam Black, the accomplice of Kilburn, was shrewd enough to make good her escape, and was not seen again in Lowell or Lawrence. Among Stella's congratulating visitors was the bootblack, Dary the Kid.

"I allers said you was the boss girl, Stella," he said in his plain spoken, but well-meaning way, "and I'm glad you got away with the vilyun. By hookey! when you come to think of it, don't it seem just like a play?"

Stella did not return to work in the mill. Edward Maxwell, who had now won a good name and general sympathy, was promoted to a more lucrative position.

This settled a matter which had long been a problem in his mind, and one day arrangements were made for a wedding, which took place at once, and Stella Lord changed her name to Maxwell.

It was a happy occasion, and those who participated had reason to remember it ever thereafter. Mrs. Lord now began to mend in health, and from poverty, they sprang up to comfort and plenty. What better comfort could we wish them; respected and honored residents of Lowell today?

But Edward Maxwell has not forgotten that terrible night on Central bridge, and his miraculous escape from what seemed a certain death.

And shortly after his reclaiming Stella and Kilburn's tragic end, the thrilling report of Stub Howard's death in jail was circulated. And with him ended forever the mystery of the Central bridge fire.

For just before his demise, and while he felt the grasp of the grim angel upon him, he sent for witnesses and said he had a confession to make.

"I might as well tell it now," he said. "I'm done with this life and it won't trouble me any more. I can tell you all about the burning of the bridge. After I threw Maxwell's body between the partitions, I then—I—started to—I—oh, God—I am dying—I—"

This was all. Some claimed that he whispered the words, "I set the bridge afire," but others did not credit this. However this was, the evidence was conclusive enough, that, he it was, who set the bridge on fire. And thus, to the satisfaction of many at last, was the matter settled. The evident, but unfinished, confession of a dying man seemed conclusive enough to even the most skeptical.

But however it was, the old bridge, with its dark footwalks, suggestive of crime, is gone, and an elegant new structure supersedes it to day. But the traditions of the old bridge yet linger about the place where it stood, and will serve to add a flavor to this romance connected with the mystery of the Central bridge fire.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### FLANAGAN IS CAPTURED AT LAST. \*

DAN HAYES hardly knew what to do when Flanagan commanded Crook to take the lantern and see if anybody besides themselves was in the cellar.

Crook advanced toward the spot where the detective knelt and flashed his lantern about. But he did not see Dan, as luck would have it, and said gruffly:

"Nobody here, John. All is clear, I guess."

"All right," said the cracksman. "Come back to work."

Crook shambled back across the cellar. Dan drew a breath of relief. It is needless to say that a great weight was lifted from his mind.

He could hear the safe breakers again at work. Presently, however, the sounds ceased and the cellar was dark.

He knew that the vault had been entered, and that they were inside it. He waited for

some moments and then crept across the cellar feeling his way as he did so.

In a few moments he reached the tunnel in the wall, made by the cracksmen, and hesitated whether to pass through it or not. Second thought bade him not to do it as he would incur much risk by such a move. The safest and best way was to wait on the outside until they came out.

Time passed and he could hear the click of their tools at work upon the safe within the vaults. Finally there came a dull explosion, which he knew was occasioned by the blowing open of the door.

This taught him that he had not much longer to wait, and he prepared himself for the final struggle. It was very dark in the cellar, and he knew that all he could rely upon was the light of the safe-breaker's lantern when they should appear.

All was silence now. The safe-breakers were evidently listening to learn, if possible, if the shock of the explosion had been heard. But after a while Dan heard them again at work and knew that their fears were assuaged.

As the minutes sped by, the detective's suspense was great. It was no slight task that he had essayed, that of capturing two desperate bank-breakers alone and unarmed. But he did not flinch and had little doubt but that he could manage them single handed. At last the critical moment came.

There was a rustling sound in the tunnel under the wall, and Dan heard deep breathing.

Then a form emerged in the gloom and a voice said:

"Are ye there, John?"

It was Crook who spoke.

"Yes," came back the reply from the vaults.

"Did ye get through all safe?"

"You bet I did."

"Ye didn't drop any of the boodle?"

"Nary a dime. But it's all fired heavy. Must be fifty thousand there sure."

"It's a good haul," said Flanagan jubilantly.

"But turn on the lantern, Charley; I can't see anything."

There was a moment of suspense to Dan and then the light from the lantern flooded the cellar. Crook turned the slide and arose to his feet as he did so. When he lifted his gaze he was rewarded with a sight which caused him to reel back and a hoarse cry to peal from his lips. There directly in his path was the form of a man with a pistol in each hand and pointing directly at him. He was face to face with death.

"Ugh!" gasped Crook in terror. "John, we're trapped. There's a man in the cellar. It's Dan Hayes!"

The tableau was one difficult to describe. The detective gazed steadily and sternly at his man.

"Yes, Charles Crook," said Dan sternly. "You are bagged this time. Dare to move a hand and you are a dead man. Hands up!"

Mechanically the villain obeyed and the hand which did not hold the lantern was up-lifted. At this moment Flanagan emerged from the tunnel.

"Hands up, John Flanagan," said Dan. "You're my prisoner. I've got you where I want you, this time."

Flanagan's lips parted, and he showed his teeth like a wolf at bay. Mechanically he obeyed and threw up his hands muttering:

"Curse you, Dan Hayes!"

But John Flanagan was not the man to tamely submit, even against such odds. He had faced death many times before and did not shrink from the ordeal now. He gazed sullenly at Dan, and gruffly said:

"Well, you've got the drop on us, Dan Hayes."

"Yes," said the brave detective, triumphantly. "Your race is run, John Flanagan. Put on those."

He threw a pair of manacles at the cracksman's feet. Flanagan hesitated, but there seemed no alternative, as the weapons stared him in the face.

But at that moment an inspiration seemed to seize him. His eyes had been swiftly roaming about in quest of some new opportunity. They had observed a good one.

And as he lowered his arms now with a sudden movement, he struck the lantern from Crook's hands and sank down upon the cellar bottom. It was a daring, desperate move. The detective knew that his own life depended upon it, so he fired twice in the darkness.

Crack-ack.

The two reports were almost blended in one. There was a dull cry of agony from Crook, then Dan became conscious of a dark form rushing upon him in the gloom. The pistols were dashed from his hands and he was seized in a powerful grip. He knew that he was in for it, and, summoning all his strength, grasped his assailant. That was a terrible struggle which followed in the depths of the dark cellar.

Dan knew that Flanagan was his assailant, and he was also aware of the other's prowess in a hand to hand conflict. Few would have thought but that the cracksman was the better man. But Dan Hayes was possessed of mettle which one would least suspect until brought into actual contact with it.

Backward and forward swayed the two struggling men. There was no witness to that struggle, but the all-seeing eye above. It was a struggle for life. Each knew that failure meant death. Dan knew the implacable hatred which Flanagan had for him, and that he would not hesitate to put him from his path forever. What would be his fate in the grip of the law, Flanagan knew too well.

These realizations heightened the desperation of the conflict. One moment Flanagan held the upper hand, then with an almost superhuman effort Dan mastered him, and almost before the cracksman knew it the manacles were upon his wrists. He was a captive.

And at that moment steps and voices were heard and lights flashed in the cellar. The noise of the conflict had aroused people in the neighboring block and a number of policemen had descended into the place.

The explanation was quick and satisfactory, and Dan, bleeding and exhausted, but triumphant, was suffered to lead his man away.

Crook had made his escape, though he left a trail of blood behind him, evidence that he had been shot. But Dan was well satisfied. He had at last bagged the notorious Flanagan and was the lion of the hour.

All the papers in New Haven applauded the exploit, and the affair was the general theme of conversation for days.

When Dan returned to Lowell he was given a general ovation by his legion of friends. A despatch to the Boston Herald of that date may be considered explanatory:

"The man Moore, whose real name is Flanagan, and who is wanted in Salem for breaking into Keene's house, was today arrested in New Haven for safe-breaking, by Detective Dan Hayes. Moore is the man who escaped from Salem jail, and who, when surrounded by twelve Lowell police officers, dared them all and made his escape. There is a warrant against Flanagan for assault upon police officer Kelly with a pistol upon the night of his attempted arrest last fall in Lowell, but as he is wanted in Lynn after the settlement of the New Haven case, it will be some time before he can be sent to Lowell for trial. Much credit is due Dan Hayes for his skill and courage in capturing at last the notorious burglar, Bad Man Flanagan."

[THE END.]

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## Nature's Own True Laxative

The Great California Liquid Fruit Remedy.

Manufactured only by the California Fig Syrup Company, San Francisco, California; made from the celebrated blue fig of the Golden State.

SYRUP OF FIGS is the only Liquid Fruit Remedy in the World.

Perfectly safe and harmless in its nature; gentle, yet prompt and thorough in its action. It does not gripe or sicken and gives general satisfaction to all who use it. Unlike salts, pills, oil and other cathartics, Syrup of Figs never leaves the bowels costive, it gives strength to those organs so that regular habits may be formed.

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